FOLK TALES OF INDIA SERIES 20 VOLUMES

General Editor P C Roy Chaudhury

FOLK TALES OF RAJASTHAN

20 VOLUMES IN THE SERIES

1 Folk Tales of Tamilnadu by K A Seethalakshmi
2 Folk Tales of Kashmir by Bani Roy Chaudhury
3 Folk Tales of Assam by Mira Pakrasi
4 Folk Tales of Orissa by Shanti Mahanty
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12 Folk Tales of Andhra Pradesh by B Rama Raju
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17 Folk Tales of Madhya Pradesh by Dr Shyam Parmar
18 Folk Tales of Maharashtra and Goa by Dr (Mrs) I Sheorey
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20 Folk Tales of Haryana

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GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Folklore in the different parts of India is a rich legacy for us While researches in ancient and modern history have been directed in recent decades more to the succession of kings and political shifts not much notice has been paid to the culture, complex traditions and social beliefs of the common people The sociologists have also to pay a good deal of attention to the customs and beliefs of the people and changes therein through the ages They have rather neglected the study of folklore which is a reliable index to the background of the people There has always been an easy mobility of the folklore through pilgrimages *melas* and fairs The wandering minstrels, *sadhus* and *fakirs* have also disseminated them People of the North visiting the temples of the South and *vice versa* carry their folk tales songs riddles and proverbs with them and there is an inconspicuous integration The *dharamsalas* inns and the *Chattis* (places of rest where the pilgrims rest and intermingle) worked as the clearing house for the folk tales traditional songs and riddles That is why we find a somewhat common pattern in folk literature of different regions The same type of folk tale will be found in Kashmir and in Kerala with different regional complex These stories were passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth before they came to be reduced to writing

Folklorists have different approaches to the appreciation of folklore Max Mueller has interpreted the common pattern in folk literature as evidence of nature myths Sir L Gomme thought that a historical approach is the best for the study of folklore But Frazer would rather encourage a commonsense approach and to him old and popular folk literature is mutually interdependent and satisfies the basic curiosities and instincts of man That folklore is a vital element in a living culture has been underlined in recent years by scholars like Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown

It is unfortunate that the study of folklore in India is of very recent origin This is all the more regretable because the *Panchatantra* stories which had their origin in Bihar had spread through various channels almost throughout the world As late as in

1959 T Benfey had held that there is an unmistakable stamp of Indian origin in most of the fairy tales of Europe The same stories with different twists or complexes have come back to us through Grimm and Aesop and the retold stories are greedily swallowed by our children That India has neglected a proper study of the beautiful motifs of our folk tales is seen in the fact that the two large volumes of dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend published by Messrs Funk and Wagnalls and Company of New York have given a very inadequate reference to India

What is the secret of the fascination of the folk tales that the old young and the children are kept enthralled by their recitals? The same story is often repeated but does not lose its interest The secret is the satisfaction that our basic curiosity finds in the folk tales The folk tales through phantasies make beliefs and complacent understanding help the primitive man to satisfy his curiosity about the mysteries of the world and particularly the very many inexplicable phenomena of nature around him We have an element of primitiveness in our mind in spite of the advancement of science around us Even a scientist finds great delight in the fairy tales of the moon being attacked as the origin of the lunar eclipse Through the folk tales man exercised his once limited vision and somehow or the other we would like to retain that limited vision even when we have grown up The advancement in science can never replace the folk tales On the other hand folk tales have helped the scientific curiosity in the man In spite of the scientific explanation as to why earthquakes take place the old, young and the child would still be delighted to be told that the world rests on the hood of the great snake and when the snake is tired with the weight he shakes the hood and there is an earthquake Among the Mundas an aboriginal tribe in Bihar there is a wonderful explanation of the Orion The sword and belt of the Orion the Mundas imagine form their appropriate likeness to the plough and plough share which the supreme *Sing Bonga* God first shaped in the heavens and then taught people on earth how to use the plough and the plough share It is further in the Munda folk tale that while the *Sing Bonga* was shaping the plough and the plough share with a chisel and a hammer he observed a dove hatching its eggs at a little distance The *Sing Bonga* threw his hammer at the dove to bag

the game He missed his mark and the hammer went over the dove s head and hung on a tree The hammer corresponds to the Pleiades which resemble a hammer The Aldebaran is the dove and the other stars of Hyades are the eggs of the dove Any illiterate Munda boy will unmistakably point out these star groups

Weather and climate have their own stories and are often connected with particular stages of the crops The wet season and the hottest month are intimately associated with the ripening of crops or the blossoming of trees or the frequency of dust storms and stories are woven round them But nothing is more satisfying as a folk story than the explanation of the phases of the stars moon and the sun A Munda would point out the milky way as the *Gai Hora* i e the path of the cows The *Sing Bonga* God leads his cows every day along this path—the dusky path on the sky is due to the dust raised by the herd The dust raised by the cows sends down the rains A story of this type can never fail to sustain its interest in spite of all the scientific explanation of the astral bodies

The why and therefore of the primitive mind tried to seek an answer in the surrounding animal and plant kingdom Animals are grouped into different categories according to their intelligence and other habits The fox is always sly while the cow is gentle The lion and the tiger have a majestic air while the horse is swift sleek and intelligent The slow going elephant does not forget its attendant nor does he forget a man that teases him Monkeys are very near the mankind The peacock is gay while the crow is shrewd The tortoise is slow going but sure footed The hare is swift but apt to laze on the road The primitive mind is not unintelligent to decipher these inherent characteristics of the common animals he meets Similarly when he sees a large and shady peepal tree he naturally associates it as the abode of the sylvan god The thick jungle with its trees and foliage is known to be frequented by thieves and dacoits Any solitary hut in the thick of the forest must be associated with someone unscrupulous or uncanny These ideas are commonly woven into stories and through them the primitive mind seeks to satisfy the eternal why and how of the mind Folk literature is often crude and even grotesque The stories of the witches and the ogres come in this category There is nothing to be surprised

at that They reflect the particular stage of the development of the human mind and also a projection of the beliefs and fads of the mind Scientific accuracy should never be looked for in folk tales although folk tales are a very good reflex of the social development of a particular time

It is enough if the basic ideas regarding the animal and plant kingdom still satisfy that the donkey is dense or stupid or the snake typifies slyness and the fox is deceitful repeated in ancient folk tales have stood the test of age and that would show that the primi tive mind was not foolish or credulous The very idea that the folk tales have woven man nature animal and plant creation together shows the great flight of imagination and a singular development of mind Introduction of moral lessons or any dogma was not done as an after thought but came in as a very natural development

The last source of the folk tales is human society itself The elemental moorings that are at the root of human society are sought to be illustrated in folk tales The day to day life of the common man finds its full depiction in the folk tales Parental love family happiness children s adventurous habits love and fear for the unknown greed etc are some of the usual themes of folk tales The common man yearns for riches and comforts he cannot usually look for He dreams of riches princes kingdoms etc and finds a satisfaction in stories of fantasy Men love gossip and scandal Women cannot keep secrets children will love their parents a mother in law will always think the daughter in law needs to be told—these are some of the basic ideas that make up much of our daily life The folk tales are woven round them and whether fantastic or with a moral undertone they only reflect the daily chores tears and joys of the common man

Unknowingly the folklorists bring in the religious custom beliefs food habits modes of dress superstitions etc and thereby leave a picture of the culture complex of the region and its people A tribal story does not picture a king riding a white big foaming horse followed by hundreds of other horsemen going for a *shikar* In a tribal story the Raja will be found cutting the grass and bringing back a stack of it for feeding his cows but a folk tale more current in urban areas will have large palaces liveried servants ministers and courtiers in the king s court All this only means that the time and the venue of the origin of the stories are widely different It

is here that the sociologists and the anthropologists come in useful As life is different in rural and urban areas or is chequered with goodness or badness of the world so is folk literature diversified as it must be—being a replica of life

It is a pity that these beautiful folk tales in India were almost on the point of disappearance when a few pioneers mostly consisting of foreign missionaries and European scholars looked into them and made compilations in different parts of India Our present run of grandmothers knows very little of them The professional story tellers who were very dearly sought after by the old and the young not to speak of the children have almost completely disappeared from India The film industry and the film songs pose a definite threat to folklore

The Sterling Publishers are to be congratulated for launching the project of publishing a compilation of 20 volumes consisting of the folk tales of different regions The work has been entrusted to specially selected writers who have an intimate knowledge of their region The regional complex of the stories has been sought to be preserved as far as possible The stories have an elemental involvement about them and they are such as are expected to appeal to the child and its parents We expect the reader of the folk tales of the particular region to have a feeling after a study of the stories that he has enjoyed a whiff of air of that area We want him to have an idea of how Kashmiri folks retire in wintry nights with the *Kangri* under the folds of their clothes to enjoy gossips and how they enjoy their highly spiced meaty food We want him to appreciate the splash of colour of the sari and the flowers that are a must in Tamilnadu We want him to know the stories that are behind some of the famous temples in the South as Kanjeevaram temple We want him to know the story regarding the construction of the famous Konark temple We want him to enjoy the stories of the heroes of Gujarat Punjab and Rajasthan in their particular roles We want the reader to have an idea of the peace and quiet of a hut in the lap of the Kumaon hills We want the reader to enjoy some of the folk tales of Bengal and Bihar that have found wings in other parts of India and to appreciate the village life with their *Alpana* and *Bratas* At the same time we want the reader to appreciate the customs and manners of the Santhals Garos and the other tribes inhabiting Nefa and Assam

A set of twenty volumes of folk tales of the different regions of India by selected authors is an ambitious programme Folk tales have great impact in bringing in national integration of the country A Keralite will see a pattern of familiarity while reading the folk tales of Bengal Assam and Kashmir Maharashtra and Orissa will come nearer to each other through ties of folk tales The reader will feel that he is at one with his brother or sister elsewhere A spread of knowledge of the social patterns of the different regions is a pre requisite for national integration It can be modestly claimed that this folk tales series will be of great help in that direction The Publishers want to have a miniature India in these 20 volumes

The authors have to be thanked for their interest in the work I am sure that they have enjoyed the assignment It is hoped the books will be found useful and interesting to the public I have no hesitation in saying that the stories of the different areas do make out a miniature India It is hoped the reader will enjoy the stories and will come to know more of the region and its people

P C Roy Chaudhury

PREFACE

Rajasthan, the land of the Rajputs—is a land of chivalry, legend and a rich oral literature a land full of gaiety and colour of men and women to whom honour is dearer than life itself

The shape of Rajasthan is roughly that of a diamond lying to the north west of Madhya Pradesh The Aravalli Range cuts across it from south west to north east In the northern half we have the desert and mountains stand with high cliffs The people there know what is thirst and this land a life of austerity in which comfort has to be won and not had for the asking Famine often stalks the land as the rainfall is very scarce and fitful In addition to this mauraiders had in the past with devastating regularity raided and ravished the land and whom the people of Rajasthan had with equal ferocity driven back and where they failed their wives and daughters had committed the *jowhar* or self immolation to preserve their sanctity whilst the men donned *kesari* or saffron coloured clothes which implied their intention of fighting unto death

Rajasthan is a country of varied geographical features The scorching noon day heat of the desert which may turn to frost at night There are the lovely lakes and fertile valleys where the arts of the village are practiced The blue pottery the printed cloths and enamelled metal and glass of Rajasthan are some of the ancient village arts

Rajasthan has a rich heritage of folk lore Folk literature was everywhere, initially an oral literature but in Rajasthan it appeared in the written form at a relatively early date and the incomparable story teller who later turned professional has flourished through the ages Story telling became the hereditary occupation of the *Bhat*, the *Charan* and the *Bandi* They devoted themselves mainly to stories genealogies and proverbs The religious customs modes of dress superstitions etc were skilfully woven into their tales which rendered them all the more interesting Rajasthan folk tale abound in stories of heroes who sacrifice their life for their honour of women not to be out done who

walk into the flames to preserve their sanctity and of the strong headed lover who scorns obstacles to get his lady love

These tales have come down to us through the centuries The years have not dimmed their power to enthrall They excite the same interest that they did in bygone days and the morals they teach for this is probably how all folk tales get started—the desire of the reformer story teller to teach some home truths to his eager listeners—are morals that the present day world is still in need of nay perhaps more so now that life and the world are so full of problems and complications

Some of these stories have been retold and it is hoped that the stories capture a little of all that Rajasthan stands for

Bani Roy Chaudhury

CONTENTS

FOLK TALES
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1

THE WILL

AMAR Singh was a wise old man He had known days of dire poverty when he didn't have two coins to rub against each other Probably that had hardened him and he had vowed that he would work his way up the thorny ladder of success, but make his way up he would The next decade saw him toiling his weary way up but never once did he lose heart and at the evening of his life he was blessed His savings through the years had grown steadily and there came a day when he dug it all up and looked at it with satisfaction It was a big sum of money, bigger than he had ever expected it to be He sold his field which was comparatively small and bought a large one reputed to be the most fertile field in the village Then he went to a cattle fair and bought the best cows that he could spot From that day onwards, he never looked back The field and the cattle brought him large returns and at last he could afford to relax the strict discipline he had set for himself

Amar Singh had three sons They were sturdy young men and much attached to one another but Amar Singh was a wise man and had seen much of the world He was not a fool to rest assured that this love between brothers would last for all times The sons would marry, children would be born And it was but inevitable, thought the wise old man, that there would be frictions and the family and the wealth would split He gave a great deal of thought to the appropriate allocation of his wealth, and when he was satisfied that he had arrived at a wise decision, he called his sons and said

'I am an old man now and have but a few more years to live As long as you all work hard and share what you have, you will not need anything from me but when I am dead, a time may come when you may wish

to live independently. I have made provision for that day. I have divided my property amongst you according to age. Right here under my bed I have buried my will. Take it out and divide the property only when you are sure you need it."

The sons agreed. Attar Singh lived to a happy old age and then departed from this world. For a while all went well. The brothers worked hard and earned more than their needs. They divided this equally amongst themselves. They married and by and by became fathers. The children quarrelled and the wives quarrelled. The brothers feeling uncomfortable said,

"It is better that we set up separate establishments and put an end to all this. Father had once told us that he had made a fair distribution of wealth between us. Let us dig up the ground under his bed and see what he has left to each of us."

The men carefully dug under the bed and brought out three brass vessels. On opening them they found that one contained earth, the second contained bones and the third contained coal. The brothers looked at one another in blank amazement. Whatever they may have expected, these items were surely not in their thoughts.

"Whatever did our revered father mean by this?" they wondered. "Each of these items stands for something but it's beyond our power to guess."

They thought and they discussed but they could neither solve the riddle nor could they come anywhere near to a favourable answer. At last they called a meeting of the elders of the village and laid the matter before them. Now these village elders were a proud lot because they held the coveted post of village elders and they practically looked down their noses at the villagers, for they felt their wisdom somewhat akin to the wisdom of the great Vikramaditya himself. But when the problem of the old man's will was put before them, they were baffled. They coughed and they fidgeted, gulped

down a few glasses of water but nothing helped to throw light on the meaning of the three items of the will And at last, to their eternal embarrassment, they had to acknowledge defeat The three brothers were not only disappointed, they were also greatly disillusioned They



had had firm belief till now, as had all the other villagers, that there was no problem that their elders could not solve

Anyway, the brothers were determined to solve th riddle Each had to know what his share of the property was and so one day they bade good bye to their familie and set out in search of a wise man After travellin for a number of days, they arrived at the beautiful city of lakes—Udaipur They made inquiries at various place and they received one uniform answer—a wise old her mit lived in the northern part of the city

'If anyone can solve your problem said the men 'it is he

The brothers went to his hut They bowed low before him and paid their respects

'Holy father said the eldest brother we have come a long way to seek the meaning of our father s will

He told the old man about the unusual allocation of property that their father had made

What are we to infer from vessels full of earth bones and coal ? he asked

The hermit smiled and answered, 'Son, if you had spent a little time in trying to understand the meaning of the three items you would have saved yourselves this long journey '

But we did think' replied the eldest brother Not only we but our wise village elders spent much of their precious time, trying to fathom the mystery

'Your father was a very wise man How is it that you his sons are unable to unravel the mystery of the will ? This is the solution To the eldest he gave earth, which means that he gave his fields and all that they produce, to the second he gave bones, that is, he gave his cattle and to the youngest he gave coal or all the gold he had This is the meaning of your wise father's will and I hope you are all satisfied with the fair division of property

The brothers were satisfied They returned to their village and lived happily

2

THE HAND OF FATE

AFTER the first monsoon showers, there was great activity in Pipar Fields had to be ploughed, seeds had to be sown and a hundred odd jobs had to be attended to The ploughs and the bullocks were brought out and under the grey skies and the fields were ploughed with great speed Seeds were sown with equal speed Within a few days, to the great joy of the farmers, sprouts, green and tender, covered the fields What a pleasant sight they presented! The sprouts grew encouragingly day by day as benign showers fell from time to time Then suddenly, without any apparent reason, the days started to get warmer. The sun became so hot that it became impossible to stay out in the fields after mid day The farmers began to feel uncomfortable Would the rains return or would the sprouts shirvel out and die in the intense heat? They spent sleepless nights Then there came a day when they spotted a cloud At first it wasn't any bigger than the palm of a man's hand but it was a cloud and the farmers looked at it expectantly and with bated breath The cloud grew bigger and blacker Gradually more and more clouds appeared Suddenly there came a loud crack of thunder and rain began to fall It was a heavy downpour It seemed as though the clouds had sucked up the whole ocean and were pouring the water over this village The farmers hurriedly returned to their huts

Five farmers, whose fields were at some distance from the village, took shelter under a big pipal tree, but it proved of no avail Rain fell so heavily that not even the thick leafed pipal could prevent the water from falling on the five men They were already wet and

now the rain water ran down their bodies in little rivulets Added to this, there was the lightning which cracked and growled and roared and howled Sometimes it lit up the whole sky and earth To the five men it seemed that it always cracked over the pipal tree as though it had singled out that tree for destruction, as though it waited for a favourable moment when it would strike the tree and burn it down to the ground This thought made the men very uncomfortable What were they to do ? Going back to the village in the blinding rain was impossible but to stand under the tree, which somehow seemed to anger the lightning might prove fatal

One of the men said It is dangerous to stand under this tree Lightning might strike it at any moment '

'But what can we do '

'Now that is a problem that must be solved It s obvious that the lightning is acting as a messenger of Death and that there is one amongst us whose time to die is close at hand

The others listened to their companion in silence The same thought had struck them too ! Their companion continued

'If what I say is true then I don t see why we should endanger our lives by keeping him with us

'But we don't know the man who must die Then how can we save ourselves '

'That is what I have been thinking about and I have a plan If you all promise to abide by it I shall tell it to you

Since it concerns all of us, we agree to abide by whatever you say of course on condition that you will not set an impossible task '

The men blinked and cowered as, with a deafening noise thunder and lightning lashed across the sky

'Hurry, hurry,' said the four men 'Let us hear your plan The lightning seems to be getting impatient and may fall on us if we delay'

Well then here it is, we have all agreed that death in the form of lightning is waiting to carry off one of us

Four heads nodded in unison

Now do you see that babool tree across that small field?'

Again the four heads nodded in unison

'We will run across that field one by one touch the trunk of that tree and return here Lightning will strike the doomed man when he goes out from the shelter of this tree In this way four of us will be safe'

The plan met with the approval of all the men and the first man to venture forth was named His face became pale, his legs felt like jelly, but he took courage in both hands and set out Lightning cracked and growled, the landscape lit up as though lit by a thousand bright lamps The man nearly collapsed with fright but he managed to touch the trunk of the babool tree and return to the shelter of the pipal tree

In the same manner the next three men went and returned though it is best not to dwell on the mental agonies they suffered as they went through the ordeal But all's well that ends well and once they were back to the pipal tree, their relief was so great that they forgot all their anxieties and agonies

It was now the turn of the fifth man It goes without saying that he was already half dead with fright Now that the four men had returned safely, he was certain and so were the others that he was the victim chosen by Death He looked at the field that he had to cross, at the trunk of the babool tree that he would

have to touch and he promptly swooned His legs felt like jelly and he flopped down on the wet mud

'Come on said the others, 'do as we have done Go and touch the babool tree

'No !' he cried I will not go I m certain that once I step out into the open I'll be a dead man

'That may be true In fact we are sure that it is true, that you are the victim when Death has signalled out We will not allow you to back out now You must go and touch that tree'

'Please sirs' cried the miserable man 'don t deliberately send me to my death You all obviously have a long life ahead of you and if I stay herewith you, probably I ll be saved, for the lightning cannot and will not strike as long as you all are here Have mercy on me and spare me I'll be forever obliged and grateful to you

'Don't be silly We don t want to endanger our lives just for your sake Get out at once !

With these words the four men pushed the frightened man into the field He had hardly gone a few steps when he heard a deafening noise and was blinded by lightning Lightning struck the pipal tree under which the four men waited The ground caved in, the tree was charred in a flash and the four men before they could utter a sound or collect their wits, were struck down dead

The fifth man stood in the middle of the field, unmindful of the rain that fell on him He was speechless at the sight in front

3

THE WITNESS

IN the eyes of the world, the Thakur of Mandore was a rich man He lived in an attractive palatial house with carved balconies and over hanging eaves It had belonged to his ancestors There was also a retinue of servants which he had inherited along with the house and they served him as faithfully as they had his father before him On his father's death, the strong box, hidden away in the strong room had been opened It revealed a big bag of coins and all the glittering jewellery of his ancestors He never failed to pray for their departed souls as a sign of gratitude for all the wealth they had left for him But money has a peculiar way of draining out if not continuously replenished and this had happened to the wealth of our Thakur This is the time when our story begins

The Thakur was in need of money The only man he could borrow the money from was a Bania or money lender but there were so many in Mandore Whom should he go to ? He consulted his book but rejected one after another as their names came up The thirteenth name in the list caught his attention This particular Bania was doing a very flourishing business in money lending not only in Mandore but also in the neighbouring villages The money lending business had made him one of the richest men in the land It was said that he had never incurred the loss of even a coin in business He very tactfully recovered the money no matter how obstinate or slippery the debtor

The Thakur very gravely debated the question of borrowing from him The amount he needed was not a very small sum It was Rs 750/ As he was pondering

a sudden idea struck him It was an unkind one and he was aware of this, but the more he thought about it the more he liked it He decided to borrow the money from the Bania and not repay him The result would be that the Bania s reputation of being a clever and tactful man in recovering his debts would be tarnished whereas the Thakur would be known as a clever man who had out witted the Bania

With these thoughts, he went to the Bania and borrowed the money The Bania had no hesitation in giving the amount as the Thakur was a well respected man of the town Moreover he the Bania had given the money after making entries in his books and had taken signatures of two witnesses All this, of course, meant nothing to the Thakur He took the money and that was the last the Bania was to see of either him or the money for quite a long time

A year s complete silence on the part of the Thakur displeased the Bania He liked to have his accounts settled amicably even though he knew that this was a rare thing in his business The debtors had a knack of evading him but he had long learnt all their tricks and knew exactly when and where to catch them He now centred all his attention on the Thakur

It was the month of *Sawan*, the Indian month between mid July and mid August A fair was held on every Monday of this month in Mandore and this was largely attended by men women and children These fairs were associated with the worship of Baij nathji or Shiv The Bania knew that the Thakur attended these fairs with his family On a Monday, he also went there and successfully cornered the Thakur When the matter of the debt came up, the Thakur said Today is a day of prayers, feasting and music Why bring up the topic of money on such a day and in such a place ? Next month I will surely repay the debt

The month of *Sawan* passed by but neither the Thakur nor the money showed up One evening the Bania went to his mansion He found him surrounded by friends 'This is just the time to catch him," decided the Bania

'Thakurji, it has been a long time since you took money from me When do you intend repaying me ?' He asked

The Thakur did not at all approve of the Bania making public and that too in front of his friends the fact that he had borrowed money But he kept calm In a light vein he replied, 'Tomorrow I shall come to your shop and repay the debt '

'I have become quite weary of your tomorrows Countless of them have come and gone but I have yet to see my money '

'This is not the way to speak,' protested the Thakur becoming red in the face 'It seems money has made you forgetful of your manners '

' I have been very careful about my manners all these months but your continued determination not to repay me has perhaps made me a bit forgetful But what about your manners ? What do you or anyone say to a man who borrows money and then does not repay ? Perhaps you call that good manners '

At these words the Thakur felt badly insulted He found himself choking with rage He vowed within himself that he would avenge this insult The Bania on the other hand, satisfied that he had said enough, took his leave

The more the Thakur thought about the incident the more angry he became The Bania had to be taught a lesson The Thakur bided his time One day he was informed that the Bania was going to the next village the same afternoon Early in the day, the Thakur mounted his horse and rode away and about twenty

miles from Mandore he alighted and waited By and by he sighted the Bania As soon as he was near, the Thakur unsheathed his sword and said, 'At last I have you at my mercy I will slice you down with my sword for insulting me in front of my friends'

The sight of the sword made the Bania nervous But in spite of all his nervousness the Bania did not lose his presence of mind Keeping a safe distance from the sword, he said 'How correctly I have read you Thakurji! I knew that you would be here to waylay me and that is why I left a note with my wife stating that in case I did not return by nightfall it was to be presumed that you had killed me In that case, she is to take the letter to the king and see that just punishment is meted out

The words startled the Thakur though he did his best to hide his thoughts Do not try to bluff me' he said

'Well, go ahead and kill me Then see what fate awaits you'

This was said so confidently that the Thakur had misgivings Perhaps the man had really left such a note behind he thought uncomfortably Still with a show of bravado he said 'I am not afraid of all this For insulting me I will slice off your nose'

The Bania gave an inaudible sigh of relief From his life the Thakur had now turned his attention to his nose That was definitely an improvement The Bania's belief was *kal sun houai jiko bal sun nahin houai*—tact prevails where strength fails The use of strength to *settle disputes he had always despised He would now* use his tact to save his life He said 'Thakurji, it is true that I had spoken rudely to you the other day and for this I do deserve some sort of punishment Suppose I say that you do not have to repay me Will you forgive me then

'I know all your tricks You say this to save your life but later you will go to the court with your books and get me punished for non payment '

'I will do nothing of that sort I will give you a receipt to settle the matter once and for all

'I want the receipt here and now '

'Very well ' The Bania took out his books and was about to write when he said, 'Thakurji, I must have a witness When I gave you the money there were two witnesses At the time of repayment there should be at least one witness '

This the Thakur did not approve of Witnesses meant that the illegal matter would be out and he would be packed off to prison without ceremony He said gruffly, 'Make out a receipt without witnesses and without any fuss '

'But that would be invalid,' protested the Bania He looked up and down the road and his eye fell on a very old banyan tree Everyone knew about it because of its age Pointing to it he said, 'I have a very good idea Do you see that banyan tree ? I will write down the name of the tree as a witness That should be alright '

This satisfied the Thakur The tree could not bear witness to all that had taken place So the receipt was written and given and the men went their ways, each satisfied with himself The Bania wasted no time He went straight to the Rana and begged audience

He said, 'Sire, a Thakur borrowed money from me and now under a threatening sword he has made me write out a receipt without paying back a single coin '

'Why did you allow him to do that ?'

'He waylaid me in the wilderness as I was going from Mandore to the next village There he forced me to

give him a receipt As there was no one around, I made the old banyan tree a witness and wrote down as such '

The Rana found it difficult to believe his words He summoned the Thakur and asked, 'Did you borrow money from this man ?

'Yes, Sire

'Have you repaid him ?

'Yes, I have a receipt to the effect '

'Who was the witness ?'

'The old banyan tree which is about twenty miles from Mandore

'Why did you make a tree your witness ?

There was no one there at that time '

'Now answer me truthfully Why did you take a receipt at a place where there was no one but the Bania and you

The Thakur stammered and gulped but had no reply The Rana ordered the Thakur to be thrown into prison The Bania returned home a happy man His parting words to the Thakur were *khad khinai jinai kou tayar*—one who digs a pit for others finds a trap ready for himself

4

THE BOON

SETH Murarilal of Khatu was as miserly as he was rich. The basement of his palatial house was whispered to be well stocked with bricks of gold and silver. And as for cash, his strong boxes were ready to burst at their seams, so much was clamped into them. After all, said the wise heads of the town, why shouldn't there be so much wealth when Goddess Lakshmi herself had decided to settle in his house ? This must surely be so, said the lesser folk, for no man could be wealthier unless blessed by the Goddess of Wealth. But in spite of it all, the Seth and the members of his family had hardly enough to eat. Wasting money on good food or too much food would empty the coffers, said Murarilal. So a meagre meal was served everyday, oblivious of the feelings and hunger of the household.

To the joy of everyone, a grandson was born to the Seth. Of course, everyone didn't include Seth Murarilal. When the news of the grandson's birth was conveyed to him, the Seth felt so upset and angry that he nearly choked. He spent a restless day but the night was even worse. It was restless and sleepless. He tossed from side to side. His wife said

'We must celebrate the birth of our first grandson in a befitting manner. Let friends and relatives know how a millionaire celebrates such joyous occasions.'

'Celebrate the birth of our grandson ? Whatever for ? Has he come with handful of precious jewels that we should celebrate his coming ? People are really fools to waste money on such silly things.'

Needless to say the Sethani was shocked to silence The Seth continued

'All these years there were two earning members in this house and four members to feed Now whilst the earning members still remain just two, the number of people to be fed has gone up to five From where is the extra money going to come ? Answer me In a Marwari family, a boy can't earn till he has completed ten years of age This means that I will have to feed *that new born babe for ten years before he can be of* any use at all to us And you have the audacity to ask me to celebrate his birth ! Nonsense '

'Enough ! the wife cried 'Enough of your scandalous talk Must you always think in terms of wealth ? What is the use of all this wealth unless one can spend it on a happy occasion such as this ?

'Again the same term 'Happy occasion ! What are you so happy about ? I m sick with worry about how the next ten years can be provided for and here you are going into raptures about the happy occasion Who is going to pay for the boy's food, may I ask ?

Good God ! I've never heard such talk ! Please keep quiet and let me sleep '

'You can very well go to sleep because you don t have to bother about earning The whole day I've worried about this extra expenditure heaped on to my head Only one path remains open to me and that is to go to distant lands and seek to augment my earnings

Are you out of mind ? asked the shocked Sethani 'You will leave hearth and home just because there is now an extra mouth to feed ! What is the use of all those bricks of gold and silver if you can t use them when you need them ? After all why do you earn ? Isn't it because you want to live in comfort and be free from

worry ? In spite of all the wealth stored up in the basement and in the strong boxes, you are ready to go away to unknown land to earn more What is the use of it all ?'

'Spoken just like a woman ! You have no commonsense nor can you follow any reasoning Why does one accumulate wealth ? You ask The answer is that one accumulates wealth for the sake of accumulation and for the joy of it If we earned only to spend it, then how could one become wealthy and have a basement full of gold and silver ?'

'I can't follow your line of argument It sounds meaningless to me '

'Then keep quiet and don't make silly suggestions I have made up my mind to set out tomorrow morning

'No !' cried the Sethani 'I will not allow it We don't need extra money to bring up our grandson God has blessed us with more than we need '

'Good God ! Why are women so unreasonable !' groaned the Seth 'Get it very clear in your mind, my dear,' he said to his wife, 'that I have decided to leave tomorrow and leave I will '

The long hours of the night passed in arguments and counter arguments but none would yield to the wishes of the other The Seth arose earlier than usual and made preparations for his forthcoming journey The Sethani refused to leave her bed

The Seth said to his daughter in law

'With the birth of a child in the house, I have to seek new means of increasing my income and this I can only do by seeking new avenues of trade I have decided to visit distant lands and try my luck But the Sethani is very much against it What is your opinion ? You're an intelligent girl Tell me what you think of my intended journey '

The daughter in law pulled her *kasumbe* or veil over her face and replied, 'I have no right to advise you Moreover I know that once you have made up your mind, you aren't likely to change it So what is the use of giving my opinion ? I think you should start your journey as early as possible There is just one wish which I want you to grant me Allow me to cook the food for your journey No one should supervise or comment on it '

'That you are at liberty to do, said the Seth magnanimously, happy that he had her approval

The daughter in law made *churma* or broken wheat cakes with plenty of butter and sugar Then she filled the *chhagal* or water carrier with sweetened water These she gave to the Seth without any comment With these slung over his shoulder and with repeated advice to his son to look after the business carefully and intelligently the Seth at last set off

On and on he walked He had never walked so much in all his life and after a few miles, his feet felt like lead Blisters cropped up all over them His breathing also became difficult Fortunately there was a palm tree nearby and the Seth thankfully slumped down under it and heaved a sigh of relief He was famished and thirsty He debated a long time whether to eat then or whether it would only mean unnecessary consumption of food Probably because hunger gnawed him that he decided in favour of eating

He was extremely thirsty, so he opened the *chhagal* and tilted it to drink He had taken a gulp or two when the awful thought dawned on him The water was sweet ! This meant that his daughter in law, whom he had thought so intelligent, was downright silly She had put sugar in his water ! What a waste If this was how matters would be conducted in his absence, the family wood soon be thrown in the streets

The Seth decided not to drink another drop of the offending water He opened the packet of *churma* He was happy to see that they looked very appetizing He broke off a piece from one and hungrily shoved it into his mouth But the next moment he spat it out as though it was poison The *churma* was full of butter and sugar Good God, who had ever heard of such a waste!



'That girl is going to ruin us Why has she behaved thus? What enmity does she bear us? I won't touch a morsel of that food It is better to die of hunger than eat the *churma*

The Seth s anger knew no bounds He tore the *churma* into shreds and threw them to the crows that

came cawing loudly Then he took the *chhagal* and poured the water into a hole that he spotted at the foot of the tree Hardly had he finished pouring the water when a big black snake slithered out of the hole, its hood flattened and its lidless eyes seeking the Seth A cold shiver ran down the Seth s spine His legs seemed to be turned to jelly as he gaped at the reptile But the next moment he got a stronger hold of himself and then he ran as fast as his legs could carry him After running some distance he had to stop or his lungs would have burst He turned around and in flash he was off again The snake was overtaking him at an incredible speed ! But strength was deserting him and before he could save himself he tripped and fell The next moment the snake was on him The Seth gave a stifled sob, prayed to his favourite saint and awaited the worst He lay on the ground, just as he had fallen, his eyes tightly closed

'Get up Sethji,' said a voice, 'I have come to grant you a boon '

The Seth peeped out of one eye What he saw, made him sit up and rub his eyes Standing before him was a handsome young man The snake was no where to be seen

'Who are you ?' asked the Seth, feeling bolder with the snake out of sight

I'm the son of Sesh Nag the great snake I live in the hole near that palm tree I was very thirsty indeed I would have died of thirst if you hadn t poured that sweet water into my hole It saved my life You are my saviour Ask any boon and it shall be granted

Boon ?' croaked the Seth 'What boon can I ask for ? My only interest in life is to earn money and to save it But I don t love money that isn t the result of my hard work No, I don't want any boon Let me

go my way in peace That itself will be a great boon to me

'That can't be,' replied the young man 'I must reward you and I will not let you go till you have asked me for something'

'What an unnecessary bother' grumbled the Seth 'I don't want any reward and this young man insists that I take one What can I do?'

An idea struck him and he said, 'Listen, I am incapable of choosing the right sort of reward My daughter in law is an intelligent girl We'll go home and ask her You can give whatever she asks for'

The two men set off homewards On reaching home the Seth sought out the daughter in law and scolded her for her inexcusable waste Then he related all that had taken place and said

'If you hadn't sweetened the water, this young man wouldn't have pestered me and insisted on a reward'

Before the girl could reply, the Sethani said, 'Here is a golden opportunity of getting a lot of wealth Tell the young man that you want a lot of wealth and then you will not have to leave hearth and home to earn it'

'What a silly idea!' replied the Seth 'As if there can be an end to wealth Moreover the pleasure of earning money is in working for it I don't approve of your proposal'

'I have a proposal to make,' said the daughter in-law, 'but I will make it only if I am assured that you will accept it'

'Yes, yes, I will accept whatever you say

'Ask the young man to grant you the boon that you may remain the master of your wealth'

The Seth laughed aloud 'What sort of boon is this?' he asked Am I not the master of my wealth ?'

'No, you are not the master of your wealth It is just the other way round Your wealth is your master You are merely acting as the keeper What is the use of your wealth if you can t spend it in times of necessity ? Your wealth remains locked up in your stong boxes and is of use neither to you nor to any other human being If you have to ask for a boon at all ask for this boon that you become the master of your wealth

'What meaningless nonsense !' grumbled the Seth He felt quite disillusioned He had thought his daughter in law to be an intelligent and sensible girl The words of the young man broke upon his thoughts

'I have granted many boons,' the young man was saying, 'but never has anyone asked for such an unusual boon It s undoubtedly the best I ve heard so far

Though the Seth hadn t at all understood a word of what his daughter in law had been trying to say, the words of the young man gave him second thoughts After all, he thought, what harm if he asked for what his daughter in law had suggested Of course he saw no earthly benefit accruing from it

'All right, he said to the young man, 'grant me the boon that I remain the master of my wealth

'Be it so,' said the young man and vanished

As the days went by a change came over the Seth The change was very gradual but it was perceptible The Seth no longer hankered after wealth nor did he waste all his time and energy in trying to earn it He gave his bunch of keys to the Sethani saying

'Keys belong to the lady of the household Keep these and don't bother me about such trivial things as

expenditure After all one earns money to live in comfort See to it that there is never any want in the house '

Soon there came a day when he called his family together and said 'Famine has struck the land My stores are full of grain I have ordered it to be dis tributed to the poor Don't turn away anyone that may come to beg at these doors '

So by the granting of a seemingly meaningless boon, the miserly Seth turned into a magnanimous man

5

A VILLAGE GIRL OF RAJASTHAN

THE clatter of hoofs echoed through the afternoon stillness, as Prince Ursingh of Chitor and his com panions rode on in search of game It had been a useless day They had not been able to kill a single animal Suddenly one of the men gave a loud cry He had spotted a wild boar The hunters spurred their horses and set them at full gallop Soon they had left the forest behind In front of them stretched fields of maize The stalks of maize were nearly 10 to 12 feet in height The boar plunged into these and was momenta rily lost to the hunters One of the men climbed a tree to trace the beast Pointing his finger to his left, he urged the others to go that way The hunters tethered their horses to the trees and set off on foot They soon came to a clearing Here they found a village girl standing on a wooden platform She was watching over the maize fields As the hunters came near, she asked,

'What are you hunting in my fields ? You have stamped down nearly half of my maize stalks '

The prince replied 'I am sorry We were chasing a wild boar and we really did not realise that we were destroying your crops

The girl asked in surprise, 'Chasing a wild boar ' Do you need all these men to kill a single boar ?'

This embarrassed the prince and startled him too He turned around and looked at his friends One said 'Let's go

The girl put up a restraining hand 'Wait,' she said, 'Wait for me, I will return in a little while '

She picked out long, tough looking stalk and hold ing it as one holds a spear, she stood on her toes and scanned the fields Then she aimed and threw the stalk

After this, she disappeared into the fields The men looked at each other and asked 'Whatever is she doing ?'

They did'nt have to wait long for the answer The girl soon appeared, dragging something behind her They stared down stupidly as she placed the wild boar in front of them A maize stalk had pierced it right through its body and killed it They knew whose maize stalk it was

'Here take away your wild boar and leave my fields,' said the girl shortly and returned to her platform Without a word the men hoisted the animal on their shoulders and walked off They lit a fire under a shady tree and merrily cooked the boar As they were eating, they saw a stone go swishing past and hit one of the horses on its knee The horse pitched forward and fell to the ground, moaning The stone had caused a broken knee Anger flared up within the men, for to a Rajput, a horse is one of his dearest possessions They rose to a man, sword in hand, ready to kill the man who had dared to do such a deed They saw the village maiden running towards them She came to the prince and was full of apologies for having unknowingly wounded the horse

'But why did you throw a stone at all ?' asked the prince

'I was trying to drive away the birds from my field when the stone, which I had aimed at them, hit your horse'

The prince dismissed her By the time they had eaten and rested evening shadows had started to lengthen The hunters got ready to depart As they trotted through the forest, they met the same village lass She was carrying a pot of milk on her head and was leading two buffaloes by either hand The hunters quickly conferred amongst themselves and reached a unanimous decision They decided to tease her One of them charged forward His was the job of overturning the vessel of milk His companions watched, laughing aloud The

girl on the other hand watched the on coming horseman with eyes narrowed Just as he was about to dash against her, she, as quick as lightning, pushed one of the young buffaloes forward The buffalo gored the horse, and the rider was brought to the ground, whilst the horse, frightened and neighing aloud shook himself free and stood up The girl cast one scornful look at the fallen rider and then at his companions Then as though nothing had happened, she walked away, the vessel on her head as steady as before, and the buffaloes on either side of her The men looked thoroughly embarrassed and ashamed as they helped their friend to his feet But they were also mighty impressed by the girl's uncanny strength They rode back to Chitor in silence

The next morning Ursingh rode back to the same maize field His friends went with him The girl was nowhere to be seen On inquiring they found out her father's name and he was summoned The old man came and much to the merriment of the young Rajputs, he sat down next to the prince without so much as 'with your leave, sir' Ursingh asked for his daughter's hand in marriage The old man looked neither surprised nor flattered He just said, 'No without giving any reason, and went away

The young men were struck dumb by the refusal The heir to the great Chitor throne, the son of the great Bheemsingh, had been flatly refused ! This was some thing beyond their comprehension As they wondered what earthly reason there could have been for the refusal, they saw the old man returning This time he folded his hand and begged to be forgiven

'Please accept my daughter When I told my wife about your proposal and my refusal, she scolded me for being a fool and warned me that if I didn t return and ask your forgiveness, she would turn me out of the house

Thus the brave girl became the wife of Ursingh She later became the mother of the brave Hamir, who won back Chitor from the Toorki rulers

6

A DROP OF MILK

AJAY Singh was once on a visit to his friend's house He was not only an unusually shy person but to make matters worse he suffered from night blindness This latter fact was not known to many as he always took great pains to conceal his failing

When he arrived one evening unannounced and unexpected, he was lovingly received by his friend Choice food was cooked and served before him He nibbled a little here and a little there, too shy to show that he was hungry In fact he was very hungry for he had had no food to eat during the journey

The meal over, sweets were served A lady with a dish came by She dipped a ladle and was about to serve when he, out of sheer habit, put out both hands and shook his hand in refusal The lady moved on Ajay Singh felt sorry for himself He had had no intention of refusing for the loved *kheer* or thickened sweet milk, the item he had just refused, but now it was too late The lady had served the others and was nowhere in sight From the corner of his eye he enviously watched his neighbour lap up the *kheer* with great relish Ajay Singh looked at his own empty plate He spied a drop of *kheer* that had fallen on it Making sure that no one was looking, he scooped it up with his finger and licked it It tasted so sweet and delicious ! How he cursed himself but now it was of no use The men were leaving their seats to wash their hands

It was night and every one retired to bed The house was quiet, aye, so quiet that even the mice could

be heard scurrying to and fro The world slept but not Ajay Singh He tossed about restlessly in bed He was still very hungry He thought about the drop of *kheer* he had tasted, he dreamt about it and wondered that if a drop had tasted so good what about a whole cupful taste ! The more he thought about it the more he yearned for it This desire grew so strong that he sat up in bed He woke up his friend and asked, 'where is the kitchen ?'

'It is downstairs, next to the room where you had dinner but why this question ?'

'Promise me you will not tell anyone ?

The friend promised and Ajay Singh said 'You tasted the *kheer*, did t you ? Wasn t it very tasty ? Well, I, like a fool, did not take any I was only able to taste a drop of it and it tasted so delicious that now I just cannot sleep without tasting more of it

In that case ' said the friend with a smile 'I will show you the kitchen '

The two friends crept out of bed and tip toed down the steps Everything was in darkness and Ajay felt as blind as a bat He held on firmly to his friend and inched his way along He had crossed two rooms when he sniffed the air He smelt food, which meant that they had reached the kitchen He knew that the left over pot of kheer would be hanging in the air tied to one of the ropes hanging from one of the rafters as was the custom in Rajasthan This way it was safe from cats and rats The friend groped in the darkness, swinging his hand in the air, to find the pot Before he could stop when his hand touched it, the pot overturned and landed pat on Ajay's upturned face He could not or rather dared not let out a cry for fear of waking up the sleeping household He gave a stifled sob and then he hurriedly lapped up the dripping but delicious *kheer* He had had his fill when the awful thought dawned on

him that he was all sticky and wet The moment the pot had overturned, the friend had made a quick exit What was Ajay to do now ? To go back to bed in this state was out of question but bathing at this late hour was also not possible The splashing of water would definitely wake up the people and they would want to know the reason for this late bath As he wondered what to do there came a loud clanging sound His foot had hit a brass utensil

'Who is that ?' came the dreaded voice of his friend's father Panic seized Ajay He dived into the passage on the left and ran along it till he reached a room The smell and the bleating of the sheep told him that he was in a shed He crept in among the sheep as he heard the old man making a round to see that all was well

Soon peace descended upon the house Ajay was still among the sheep The creaking of a door arrested his attention Two men stealthily entered the shed Their whispers confirmed his worst fears They were robbers Ajay gulped a couple of times, found a discarded sack and unobtrusively crept into it The men came his way One of them said, 'Here is the sack we had left behind when we heard the loud clanging noise ' He gave it a kick 'Aha, a sheep seems to have crept into it Let us carry it off and sacrifice it at the temple of Bhavani Tonight we have carried off a sackful of wealth from the house of two nobles We must offer a sacrifice as a sign of thanksgiving '

'You carry the sheep whilst I carry the sack of wealth '

Hoisting up the sack in which a terrified Ajay sat huddled, the robbers crept out of the house Ajay dared hardly breathe The men trudged what seemed a long distance

'At last we have reached the temple,' said one with a big sigh of relief and was about to throw down his sack when Ajay gave a loud throttled cry He had not intended to do so but the fear of being offered as a sacrifice was too much for him and before he was aware, the cry had escaped his lips Too late, he clamped his hands over his mouth The men, on the other hand, looked in awe first at the sack from which the cry had come and then at each other Fear was writ large on their faces

'It is a demon that you have there in that sack,' said one

'We are undone,' cried the other throwing down his sack, then without waiting for his companion, he ran off as fast as he could The other stood hesitating for a second, then he too threw down his sack and followed suit

Ajay could hardly believe his good luck He crept out Next to him lay a sackful of coins and precious jewellery He bathed at the temple well, then hoisting the sack on to his back, he took the road home When his friend heard of his adventures, he said, 'See what wonders a drop of *kheer* worked It has made you a wealthy man

THE CART

BHOLARAM was a well to do farmer of Kuchera, a village in Rajasthan He had discarded the hut of his father and now lived in a two roomed brick house plastered with mud and kept clean by a weekly coating of cowdung water Apart from the field that he had inherited, Bholaram had bought the one adjacent to his so that now he had a fairly large field with a good return From the beginning of the monsoons till the end of the spring, Bholaram spent all his time there When summer set in and the fields lay parched and fallow, he turned his attention to other things He brought out his cart, loaded it with fodder and led it to the market place Here he usually sold the fodder True a cart of fodder did not get a good price but it was definitely better than doing nothing

One summer he, as usual, loaded his cart, patted his grandson and left for the market place On the way he met a Bania The latter looked at the cart of fodder up and down, seemed pleased at what he saw and asked, 'That is a good cart of fodder you have there What is the price of the cart ?'

Bholaram was, what his name implied, *bhola* or simple at heart and when the Bania asked the price of the cart, he took it to mean the price of the fodder only and answered, 'It is Rs 7/ '

That is too high,' protested the Bania, making a show of walking away in refusal Bholaram shrugged his shoulders and had persuaded the bullocks to start again when the Bania came hurriedly back and said,

'I accept your price even though it is too high Lead the cart to my house'

Bholaram followed the Bania and emptied the fodder in the corner pointed out to him Money exchanged hands and he got ready to leave with his cart and bullocks The Bania suddenly ran forward and stood right in the middle of the path He said 'Not a step forward with the cart and those bullocks They now belong to me I had asked the price of the cart and that means the whole cart including the bulls

Bholaram felt he was seeing stars in broad daylight Was the Bania out of his mind to think that he would have sold everything for just Rs 7/ ? But the Bania was adamant Bholaram fell imploring at his feet but the Bania angrily pushed him aside

'Why weep now ? You cannot deny that you had said that the price of the cart was Rs 7/ !'

'I do not deny anything but you know very well that I meant only the fodder'

'I am not interested in what you meant but in what you said Now get going Do not waste my time

Poor Bholaram ! He knew that he was beaten and there was nothing he could do about it He returned home very much upset and told the tale to his son The latter literally bristled with anger at such injustice

'*Chitmen, hathmen khot*—that is our Bania His mind and dealings are full of deceit Does he want a *badaia* or congratulatory gift for what he has done ? Well well I will teach him such a lesson that the very thought of cheating will send a shudder down his spine !

The next morning the son borrowed his neighbour's cart loaded it with fodder and wended his way to the market place taking the same road his father had

taken before him He spotted a man looking expectantly down the road That must be the Bania, thought the son The moment the Bania (for it was really him) sighted the cart, he stopped and used exactly the same words he had used the day before

'That is a good cart of fodder you have there, What is the price of the cart ?'

'This year we have had no *trinkal* or scarcity of fodder and hence its price is rather low now But I will not demand any particular price Do you have a small child ?'

'Yes, I have a boy Why ?'

'In that case I will be content with a handful of coins from him '

Had he heard right ? The Bania could hardly believe his ears and his luck Just a handful of coins and that too from the hand of his two year old child, the man had said He would stuff the hand with coins of the smallest denominations He doubted whether that would add up to a couple of rupees To make sure that he had heard correctly, he asked 'Are you quite sure that a handful of coins will satisfy you ?

'Of course, I am,' came the prompt reply

It was a happy Bania who led the cartman to his house The cart was emptied over the fodder of the day before Nearby was a cart and two bullocks which the son instantly recognised to be those of his father s The Bania had disappeared Probably to stuff his son's hand with coins, mused the cartman The Bania soon appeared with a small boy in his arms

'Here take your handful of coins,' he said gaily

The cartman stepped forward, caught the boy's hands in his and took out a sharp knife

'Sethji, I had said a handful of coins

'That is correct,' said the Seth looking uneasily a the knife

'That means not only the coins but also the hand' and with these words, the cartman raised the knife threateningly as though to slice off the boy s hand The Bania nearly fainted in fright He tried to pull his boy away but the cartman had the small hand firmly in his and would not let go

'What is this silly nonsense ' demanded the Bania

'Silly nonsense ?' asked the cartman innocently I have neither said nor done anything silly'

'A handful of coins does not mean coins including hand It means only the coins

'Who said so?

'I say so'

'If that be the case then how can the price of a cart of fodder include the fodder plus the cart and the bullocks ?'

The Bania had steadily been led into a trap and now too late, he realised it He raised his hands in anguish and prayed 'Please forgive me

'Why should I ? You did not forgive my father when he begged at your feet Why then do you now beg for mercy ? Only your boy s hand plus the coins will satisfy me'

'No, no do not say such a terrible thing Ask what you will and I promise it shall be yours'

'That is a very generous offer replied the cartman still holding firmly to the boy s hand

'I am a generous man really Just name your price and you will have it'

'Well, if you are really as generous as you say you are, then a sum of Rs 1,000/ will not seem a very high price for you to pay'

The Bania gulped once and gulped hard To part with such a big sum would break his heart but he could not allow the man to cut off his dear son's hand He ran in and took out the money from his strong box He was about to give it when the cartman raised a restraining hand and said, 'Put the money in your *pugree* or turban and lay it at my feet

The Bania rolled his eyes in despair To lay one's turban at another's feet is the lowest a Bania or any Rajput could go but he saw no way out He took off the turban, put the money in it and laid it at the cartman's feet The next instant he had vanished with his son and slammed the door shut

The cartman laughed aloud He said, 'Sethji, *karola so pavola*—you will be done as you do unto others' He picked up the turban full of money, took both carts and the bullocks and returned home a rich man

8

THE DIWAN OF SARDARSHAHAR

THERE once lived in Sardarshahar, a brilliant but poor young man A weaver by trade he not only did a splendid job of weaving but his intelligent mind solved many a problem for many a family By and by the king heard of him He employed the young man Within a short time the king was much impressed by his intelligence The king raised him to the post of Diwan or chief of his ministers With great care the young man did his job and the kingdom prospered

The king was extremely pleased with the Diwan and rested contentedly among his royal cushions But others were restless The very idea of a poor weaver at the high post of a Diwan angered many, whilst it filled others with envy Amongst the latter was a chieftain of one of the outlying districts of the kingdom He was rich and ambitious and he had for a long time hoped to get this coveted job When news reached him that the post had been filled by a poor weaver, he wasted no time He went into his strong room, picked the choicest of precious gems and rode off to Sardarshahar and to the king s palace

The king was happy indeed to receive the beautiful jewels which the chieftain presented to him on a soft cushion of red velvet The men fell a talking and in the course of this the chieftain said,

'Sire yours is a prosperous kingdom and your fame has spread far and wide What will people say when they hear that you have chosen a poor weaver as your Diwan ? They will laugh at you and that is certain ly a thing you should avoid and a thing we will not

allow The wisest thing for you to do and to do immediately, will be to remove this man from the post'

'But how can I do that?' asked the king 'My Diwan is an intelligent man and does his work to my satisfaction What excuse do I have for his dismissal?'

The chieftain's forehead wrinkled up in deep thought There was complete silence in the big room Then a smile spread on the man's face He said,

'Sire, you say that he is intelligent Then test his intelligence and see whether he is really fit for the high post Call for him and say, 'Get me a glass of bullock's milk by evening or you will lose your job'

The king was fascinated by the strange request Bullock s milk! *He'd never heard of such a thing before!* He immediately called for the Diwan and issued the orders Of course he secretly hoped that the young man would succeed, for he liked him and didn't want to lose him Once the young man's superior intelligence was proved, his critics would be silenced

As for the Diwan the orders staggered him He felt as though he had already lost the job Though he was rather proud of his intelligence and could solve the most difficult of problems, he was unable to see how he could bring something which didn't exist Of course, he wouldn't so readily acknowledge defeat He returned home and spent the whole day in deep thought In the evening, he called his sister, and giving her a silver tumbler and plate, he said,

'Cover the tumbler with the plate and go to the king's court This is the message you are to deliver to him

The girl set off for the palace When she was brought before the king, the latter asked,

'Why are you here? Why hasn t your brother come as I had commanded him?

Sire, please excuse him He gave birth to a son this afternoon and hence he couldn t come ' said the girl with head bowed

'Silly girl, thundered the king 'Whoever heard of a man giving birth to a child '

Without raising her head, pat came the reply, Whoever heard of a bullock giving milk

The question embarrassed the king, and he said abruptly

'Go home, girl go home Send the Diwan to work tomorrow '

The chieftain came on the morrow sure that the weaver had lost his job for how could he have got bullock s milk ? When the king told him what had happened, the chieftain was dismayed at the clever way the weaver had wriggled out of a difficult situation but his dismay didn t show on his face Instead he said,

The weaver has passed the first test Here is another Tell him that since he is a weaver by trade, he should weave for you a *kurta* or long coat of spider s web within a fortnight If he is unable to deliver it by that time, he will lose his job

The king once again did as told The idea of wearing a *kurta* of spider's web was indeed a novel one and it appealed to him He could almost hear the oohs and the aahs of the court when they would see him in it He summoned the Diwan and issued the orders The Diwan smiled brightly as though he had been given a job after his own heart For a few days he did not appear at the palace There was no sign of him any where The king was sure that he was busy weaving the *gossamer kurta and felt mightily pleased* He thanked the chieftain for his novel idea and even rewarded him handsomely

On the sixth day, the Diwan arrived with a small tumbler in his hand He said,

Sire, will you please ask your men to set fire to the lake in your garden ? I wish to collect some of the

water's ash as only with the help of this can I weave a *kurta* of spider s web '

'B u t ' stammered the king at the strange request, 'Whoever heard of water catching fire and of water's ash ?

The weaver bowed low asked, 'Whoever heard of a *kurta* made of spider s web ?

'What you say is true ' said the king 'I have never myself heard of such a *kurta* though I would have loved to wear one There is no need to carry out my orders Go and do your work '

Once again the chieftain returned to find that his attempts to oust the weaver had failed Not only that, the weaver had risen in the king s esteem But the chieftain was not the man to give up He said to the king,

Sire, the weaver is fit for the job if he passes this last and most difficult test Tell him that he must uproot the well that is in his courtyard and put it in the market place next to the old banyan tree This he must do in a day's time or give up his job '

'Now that's a good piece of advice There isn't any well in the market place and I have been wanting to construct one for a long time If the Diwan is able to get his one there, then that solves my problem '

The Diwan was summoned He heard the orders without batting an eyelid The strange order didn't seem to bother him at all He went home and soon returned with a big fat rope

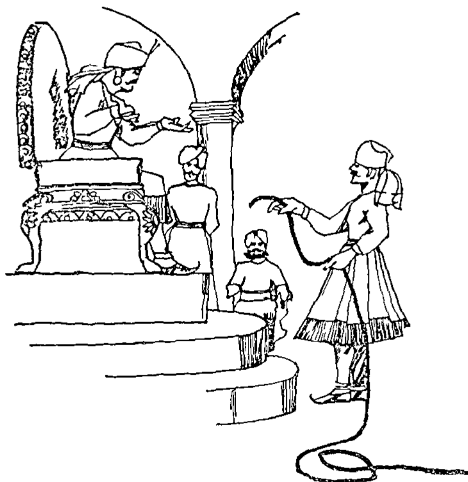
'Why have you come to court with that fat rope?' inquired the king

'Sire, I have tied one end of the rope to my well Permit me to tie the other end to your well I would further request you to command your well to lift my well from my courtyard and put it in the market place I tried to lift it but it's too heavy for me '

'But what a ridiculous request !' exclaimed the king 'How can I command my well to pull out your well ?'

'Then how can I pull out my well ?'

The king didn't know what to say After a moment's silence, he said, 'You have won Thrice I tested your intelligence and thrice you won You shall remain my Diwan, no matter what people say



He then summoned the chieftain and said 'From this moment I strip you of all power and wealth Leave my kingdom and seek your fortune elsewhere'

THE CLEVER SETH

THE Sethani was in a very bad mood indeed In the twelve months that she had been married, she could hardly remember a day when her husband had come home early He left for his shop in the morning and it was usually midnight when he returned Whenever she pouted and grumbled, the Seth would say in exaspera tion, 'You know that apart from my own work in the shop, I keep busy with all my social activities There are gatherings which I have to address, the meetings of elders which I have to attend, and then there are the men in trouble who come to me for advice Even the Rana seeks my advice and help Anyway, I keep you in great comfort, so what you have to grumble about is more than I can understand There are half a dozen servants to do the work and a carriage is always at the door awaiting your pleasure'

It was true she had nothing to grumble about as far as comforts were concerned She did not have to do any work at all She had all the money at her disposal and just recently the *patwa* or jeweller had made a *timniya* or collar studded with gems and a beautiful gold chain for her hips on which she now fastened her keys But in spite of everything she grumbled and wondered how she could make the Seth spend more time at home Fate played admirably into her hands as we shall see

The morning after the Gangor festival which was celebrated in the worship of Gauri, the goddess of bounty, the Seth was about to leave when he found his servants waiting expectantly for their *neg*—presents or cash which they expected as their right after every major festival He paid them and left home It was a very

busy day that he spent It was about midnight when he took leave of his friends One of them persuaded him to ride back on his horse as it was not safe to walk home at such a late hour The Seth accepted the offer and mounting the animal, rode off homewards On the way he had to pass a road reputed to be a haven for thieves He had but turned to this road when he found his path blocked by a drunkard It was rather dark and the Seth could not see the man's features clearly nor did he spend time in even trying to He felt sure it was a trap to rob him and so losing no time he set his horse at a gallop, knocking off the man in the process He heard a dull thud as the man's head fell on the cobbled road After riding some distance, the Seth felt he must go back and see how the man fared after the knock The road was still deserted Not a soul could be seen anywhere The Seth went back and to his utter consternation saw that the man on the ground was none other than the youngest son of the Rana The Seth nearly swooned when he discovered that the bump on the head had killed the prince What was he to do now ? If news reached the Rana he would be without ceremony hanged The Seth could almost feel the noose around his neck and involuntarily lifted his hand to loosen it He who had always advised others and got them out of trouble was now in need of his own wise counsel

He lifted the body and slowly led his horse away In one of the lanes the Seth slung the body over his shoulders and tip-toed or at least tried to to a shop which now had its doors and shutters shut It was a wine shop noted for its heady wine made from mahua flowers The prince was a regular visitor to this shop The Seth propped the body against the door and rode away into the darkness On reaching home he went off straight to bed Not an hour had passed when there was a loud thumping at the door and a voice full of fear cried Sethji Sethji please help me

Go away shouted the angry voice of the Seth Is this the time to disturb anyone

'Sethji, you must get up I am in very great trouble'

Grumbling all the way, the Seth got up and opened the door The man at the door was the very man he had expected to find It was the owner of the wine shop The man seemed half dead in fear He cried, 'Sethji, a terrible thing has happened The youngest prince, obviously drunk, was standing against the door of my shop Just by chance I opened it The prince fell forward and banged his head on the floor That bang killed him If the king hears of it then I am as good as dead Sethji, I will give you all my life's savings if you get me out of this mess' The man placed a bag of coins in the Seth's hand It has Rs 1,000/- in it' he said

After giving the matter some thought, the Seth went with the man Once more he slung the dead prince over his shoulder and keeping to the shadows, he walked to the house of a Minister The Seth had definite news that the minister was plotting against the king Still keeping to the shadows the Seth approached the door 'The youngest prince is the worst of the whole lot,' said a voice from within 'If only I could get my hands on him, I would kill him'

The Seth waited to hear no more He propped the prince against the door and raced back home Within half an hour, he heard a loud pounding at his front door

Sethji, Sethji, please get up We are in great trouble'

'Off with you,' came the angry voice of the Seth 'I shall not get up at this ungodly hour'

'Sethji, you must You must help us', pleaded the voice

With great reluctance, the Seth left his bed and opened the door The Minister whose house he had just visited stood at the door with two of his friends

Holding out a bulging bag of coins, the Minister said, 'Sethji, here are Rs 5,000/ I was having a party at my house When I opened the door to bid goodbye to my friends, the prince, who must have been drunk and who had been leaning against the door, fell down with a bang on the head That bang has killed him If the king hears of this then not only will I be hanged, but my whole family will be turned out into the streets Sethji, you must help me out of this

'This is a very delicate job you ask me to do,' protested the Seth, gradually waking up He locked up the bag of coins and went back with the men For the third time that night he slung the dead body of the prince and keeping well to the shadows he walked off towards the palace Luckily he found the guards dozing ' 'Too much feasting and wining at Gangor festival,' murmured the Seth He crept up to the door of the palace and propped the prince against it As he was coming away, the angry voice of the King came from within 'That young son of yours Rani, is a shame to the entire family I have always excused him for your sake, but if he gets into any trouble this time, he will get what he deserves and you well know what that means '

The Seth s feet took wings, when he heard the door being opened Panting hard he crept into bed Within fifteen minutes there were loud knocks on the door 'Open immediately, shouted a loud voice

'I will not be disturbed at such a late hour Go away and come in the morning '

'Open in the Rana s name

The Seth jumped out of bed and opened the door Two royal guards stood there

'The Rana has summoned you immediately '

The Seth went with them At the palace, he found the Rana and the queen in tears The dead prince lay on the royal bed

The Rana cried out, 'Seth, you are the only man in my whole kingdom who can tell me what I should do I was wishing this son of mine dead when I opened the door and he fell in and banged his head on the floor He must have been badly drunk to have fallen so heavily Anyway, that bang on the head killed him If news gets around, the whole kingdom will rise against me for bringing about his death What can I do to make it seem that the prince died a natural death ?'

The Seth was quick to rise to his Rana's help He said, 'Sire, send out your drummers and have it proclaimed that the prince has been bitten by a snake and that all measures are being taken to draw out the poison '

Breaking the silence of the night the booming of the drums announced the sad news through the streets and lanes of the capital Early in the morning another drummer went by to announce the death of the prince

A bag of Rs 10,000/ was placed in the hands of the Seth for his wise advice He returned home, a tired and rich man The night had brought him much wealth no doubt but it had nearly landed him into the hands of the hangman He vowed never again to stay out late at night

The Sethani had no further occasion to grumble

10

THE WISE GIRL

AMAR Singh was a rich businessman of Marwar A flourishing business and a palatial ancestral house distinguished him from his friends He was a widower and lived with his son and three daughters When the son was of marriageable age many proposals of marriage were received not only from ministers and rich men but one also came from the king of a small principality

Amar Singh was a fastidious old man and he had firmly decided that he alone would choose a bride for his son and with this end one day he set out on a journey He was not particular about the looks or wealth of the girl Only that girl who could give a satisfactory answer to his one and all important question, would he bring home as a bride The people of Marwar were intrigued when they heard about this What was this question which seemed so important to their honourable citizen ? They asked each other in whispers They didn t have to wait long for an answer The Indian market place, in addition to being the centre of all business, is also the centre of all gossip and Marwar excelled in this respect As the men gathered there on a market day, the question which had aroused their curiosity, leaked out Which season in the year appeals to you the most?' The question surprised and disappointed the men They had been sure that it would be a very difficult one It was obvious that each girl would answer according to her likes and dislikes Amar Singh would of course choose the girl who liked the same season as he Amar Singh is getting old and senile,' was the verdict of the crowd and they turned to other topics of interest

Amar Singh saw and heard all but his resolve remained unchanged He bade farewell to his children and set out His rich friends received him with great warmth and looked after him with great care The girls who were presented to him were all beautiful, aye, far more beautiful than those in his own hometown He put his question to each one of them and received various answers One said, 'I like winter when we wear warm clothes and feel happy and healthy, another had said, 'I like the rains for I love to listen to the patter of rain drops on the roof and the earth looks so fresh and green' Still another had answered, 'I love summer for it has neither the freezing cold of winter nor the wet or muddy months of the monsoons

The king's daughter had said 'How beautiful spring is when there are flowers and fruits everywhere

Obviously these answers didn't satisfy the old man for he shook his head politely and tactfully took leave of their fathers and went his way He returned home a disappointed man He had rejected the daughters of some of the richest men of the land Wealthy girls, it seemed, didn't know the correct answers to his question He now went to the house of an old but poor friend of his who lived in one of the narrow lanes of the city The friend was happy to see Amar Singh and wondered what had brought him to his door The matter was soon out

Amar Singh said, 'I am told that you have a daughter of marriageable age I am looking for a bride for my son'

He was not allowed to speak any further The friend, overwhelmed at the words, hustled his daughter into the room Amar Singh was relieved to see that she was beautiful He cleared his throat coughed a couple of times and then put his question

'Daughter which season in the year do you like the best ?'

The girl seemed startled by the unusual question and didn't reply immediately She gave some thought to it and then she said, 'I ve never really thought about this but now that you ask me, I think all seasons of the year have a beauty and charm of their own Moreover each season has its uses and as such I think I like all seasons equally well'

Amar Singh heaved such a big sigh of relief that his friend felt uncomfortable But there was no need for that Without much ado, Amar Singh fixed the date of the marriage and before the month was out, the girl came to his house as his daughter in law

One day the girls of the house were in the garden

Let's play *pancha*' said one of them This is a game played with five stones and one that was in great vogue in Marwar at that time The girls searched all over the garden but they couldn't find five stones of the same size Then one of them got a bright idea She said, 'Wait, I will get five gold coins and then we ll play with them'

The coins were brought and the game played Soon the girls tired of the game and discarding games and coins, they returned to the house The daughter-in law stayed behind She picked up the coins, put these in a bag and tucked this away in her skirt

Soon after this, Amar Singh called his family and said, 'I hear invaders are coming from the North You should not wear so much gold on your person It is not safe Give me your ornaments I will put them away in my strong box'

The daughters obediently gave theirs to him but the daughter-in law said, Allow me to keep mine with me I shall keep them in a safe place Later she took off her ornaments, put these in the bag in which she had kept the coins and tucked this away in her skirt

That night, without warning, Marwar was invaded In panic, people fled Amar Singh and his family mounted horses and galloped away into the darkness On and on they went, without stopping to rest the horses In the light of dawn they found they had left Marwar far behind They were now in a strange land without food or shelter

'Does anyone have any money?' Amar Singh asked in a tired voice 'We must have something to eat and a place to live in'

His children shook their head They didn't have any money with them, what was worse, the girls didn't have any ornaments on them Those had all been left behind in the strong box The daughter-in law took out the bag tucked in her skirt From this she took out one heavy gold bangle and gave it to her father in-law Amar Singh took the bangle and rode away to the nearest city A jeweller, who was also a noted cheat, met him and took him to his shop Before Amar Singh knew what had happened, he had been cheated out of the bangle and had been left in one of the winding and confusing lanes of the new city With difficulty he found his way back to his children When his son heard his tale, he was rightly indignant and offered to go This time the daughter in law gave two gold coins but before she did so she put two very small identifying marks on them The son went but he too met with the same fate in the hands of the cheat

The daughter in law now decided to go *'Ek bar thagayan sains budh awe*—'once cheated forever watchful' She bought an expensive *achkan* or long coat and churidār or tight leggings, ruffled at the ankles Donning these and mounting her horse she rode away The cheat met her and invited her to his shop

The girl in a gruff voice said, 'I wish to buy some gold coins Do you have any good ones?'

'Yes Sir' was the reply

Whilst the cheat looked for his box of gold coins, the girl looked around the room It was a small, dingy one, without much light As she glanced into the glass cases her heart gave a leap when she spotted her bangle lying in one of them At that moment, the cheat coughed and said,

'Here are some first class coins, sir '

The girl carelessly turned the coins in her hand and in due time she spotted two with red markings

'At what price are you selling a coin ?'

The man eyed the rich dress of his customer and named an exorbitant price His customer showed no signs of surprise She calmly took out three gold coins from her bag and asked,

'Will you pay the same price for my coins ?'

'But your coins aren t the same quality as mine '

'I dont agree with you Let the other goldsmiths of the city decide

The cheat felt trapped He called his fellow gold smiths and showed them the coins To his utter dismay they all said that his coins and those of the customer were of the same value

The girl waited for the men to depart Then she said in a stern voice, 'Don t attempt to cheat me as you cheated two men of my family this morning Those two coins with red marks belong to me ,

The cheat tried to put a brave front

'What proof is there that they are yours ?' he asked

So you want proof? she asked She took out a gold bangle and said, 'Take out that bangle and see if they are a pair You took that one from my father in law Give my things back to me at once or you will

have the police here in a few seconds Those two coins, with red dots, are mine'

The word 'police' was enough to frighten the cheat out of his wits He promptly fell on his knees and implored

'Please don't call the police here Take your coins and the bangle and go your way'

The girl put up a restraining hand and said,

'Not so fast,' she said 'I wish to sell you five of my coins at the price you quoted'

The cheat was near to tears as he took the coins from her and counted out the money Pocketing the money, the girl returned to her family When Amar Singh heard her story, he said,

'I knew that I had chosen a wise bride for my son'

With the money and her ornaments, Amar Singh was able to buy not only provisions and clothes for every one but he also bought a small house and started a business

11

THE FARMERS

IN Loharu village, there lived three cheats During their years of cheating people of their wealth, they had amassed a small fortune Needless to say, it had not been an easy task The police were always at their heels, ready to nab them at the earliest opportunity It was only their cunning and their ingenious plans which had saved them from counting the rafters of a prison cell

In the days of their youth, this game of hide and seek with the keepers of the law had been a series of exciting adventures but now with the passage of years, they found this game proving a strain on their mind and body Their nerves were always at an edge and this they did not approve of

One day, after they had dug out their hidden wealth, from the corner of their hut one cheat said, The fortune that we have here is sufficient to last us for many years to come I find this business of cheating and stealing too risky for us now What do you say to my suggestion that we give it up ?

'Give it up and do what ? demanded the second cheat

'Well, replied the first cheat, scratching his head, 'I would suggest that we take up some honest but profitable trade

His companions looked at him in disgust They were sure that he had lost his balance but their looks failed to discourage him He said, 'The men of this village are all farmers and they seem to live quite

happily Moreover they do not have to worry about the police and about prison cells I suggest that we buy a plot of land, and grow, for example, wheat !'

'Don't make silly suggestions,' said his companions 'Every farmer here sows wheat How can we, who know next to nothing about farming, compete with them ? If you wish to make suggestions at all, make sensible ones'

This sent the first cheat into deep thought This was a painful process but he was determined to see the matter through He sat for a long time his head between his hands Suddenly he jumped up, his face writhed in smiles

'Let's sow salt !' he cried 'Nobody here sows salt'

'What a novel idea !' cried his companions 'Growing salt ! Not one farmer grows salt After the first harvest we shall have the whole village at our door'

The excited cheats hurriedly buried their treasure Donning their fair day finery, they set off to buy the most fertile field available The prospective buyers were respectfully received

We wish to buy a big field,' the cheats said 'Money is no criterion It must be a fertile one'

'What are you going to sow ?' asked the curious folks

'Don't ask questions,' answered the cheats haughtily

For the first time in their life, the cheats were experiencing the luxury of being fussy and they made the best of it They fussed and hesitated till at the end of two days, they found a field that suited their specifications Transactions over they set about fencing it all around Throughout the day and through half the night they worked on the fence Being robbers themselves, they were highly suspicious of other people Their precious field

had to be safe from thieves Of this they needn't have worried The villagers were too afraid of them to go near their field Of course they were mighty curious They wondered and whispered and from a safe distance they watched the activities of the cheats

The field was ploughed and watered and the three set off to buy the best quality salt available in the village Three cartloads of glistening white salt were delivered at their door The next morning before the sun had risen, the cheats set out for their field Newly ploughed and freshly watered, it looked a very rich and fertile field The cheats took handfuls of salt and set about sowing this just as one would sow seeds The sun reached the zenith but they continued engrossed in their work Forgotten was thirst and hunger till the last handful of the last cart of salt had been sown At the end of their hard day's work, the three looked around contentedly and congratulated one another The villagers watched on from a safe distance

From the next day started the job of watering the field and the more trying job of waiting patiently for the crop A month passed and winter set in It happened to be the severest winter of the decade But the chilly dawns could not dampen the enthusiasm of the three cheats turned farmers They irrigated their land every morning and then spent the rest of the day dreaming of the good crop they were to reap and of the wealth it would bring In this manner a few more weeks passed by

One day it suddenly dawned on one of the cheats that in spite of their best efforts, the field remained as black as ever Of course he didn t know how salt grew or how a field of salt looked but commonsense prompted that there must be some sort of sign to show that it was growing at all He didn t say anything to his companions but he knew that the same doubts had arisen in their minds too but no one was willing to voice his concern However the next morning all three of them were satis

fied that their labour was bearing fruit The field was covered within a thin layer of white ! What this was they didn't know but it was white, the colour of salt and they were happy They rubbed their hands in glee, congratulated each other all over again and set about irrigating their field with greater zeal The work over, they returned to their hut for lunch When they came back at noon they found their field as black as ever The white layer had mysteriously disappeared That they were dismayed they didn't betray to one another Probably that is the way salt grew, they thought consolingly

The villagers looked on from a distance they had set for themselves They suppressed their smiles and stuck to their policy of non interference Who would take the risk of telling the cheats that what they saw in the morning was not their crop of salt coming up but frost which covered every field that winter ?

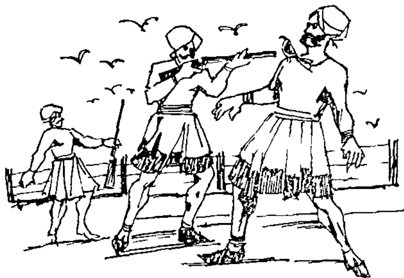
For one whole month the three men watched their field white in the morning and black in the afternoon At the end of the period they not only became suspicious but they also became angry

'I'm sure,' said one, 'that someone is stealing our salt everyday otherwise how can such a rich field of salt disappear every afternoon ? Let's hide and catch the thief '

The next day, before dawn, the men armed with guns, hid behind the clump of trees that grew on one side of the field It was a cold and frosty morning The field appeared glowing white They gnashed their teeth as they looked at it and calculated at the baskets of salt that had been stolen

The men waited in silence as the sun rose and climbed the sky It was still very cold and the field very white Suddenly a swarm of birds, twittering merrily in the early morning, flew into the field 'These are the culprits !

These are the culprits !' shouted the men in one voice Raising their guns they shot at random at the frightened birds who had barely alighted The birds rose into the air and the men fired shots in all directions, determined to kill each one of them One bird, fluttering in fear, alighted on the broad chest of one of the cheats The second cheat didn't see where the bird had alighted All he saw was the bird Without a moment's thought or hesitation, he lifted his gun and fired The next moment there was a loud, blood curdling cry as the bird and the



cheat came down Blood splattered all over his chest as he rolled and groaned His companions threw down their guns and rushed to his side, but he died before they could bring any help They were broken hearted

'Never again will we do any farming ' they resolved and returned to their old ways 'It s safer,' was their verdict

12

THF VALUE OF THE SPOKEN WORD

ONCE there was a benign ruler named Sidh Raj Hindu and Jain temples flourished side by side and many a temple spire reached to touch the sky Green fields stretched out for miles as a clear rivulet gurgled its way along the capital city One year the harvest was unusually good, golden ears of wheat, healthy and ripe, awaited to be picked by the eager farmers One farmer, a Marwari, owned many acres of land and the mounds of wheat that he reaped was staggering in breadth and volume He built new and larger store houses to store the unexpected harvest of wheat He wasn't a very happy man, for just as he had harvested a rich crop, so had the other farmers The result was that grain was abundant in the market and cheap The Marwari was a very high principled man Selling grain at a price which he thought was lower than the one he had set himself, was something he had never done and would never do Now the question arose—what then would he do with it all ? He spent sleepless days and nights He would either sell his grain at his price or not at all Unable to come to any decision, he went to his *guru* or preceptor, a man much skilled in magic The *guru* heard his laments in silence and then said,

'Go and bring me a black antelope '

'A black antelope !' exclaimed the shocked Marwari 'Where am I to get a black antelope from?'

'That s not my business,' came the short reply 'If you want my help, get the antelope '

'But has it to be only black ?'

'Yes'

The Marwari had no choice He needed help and needed it badly He sent his men around with express orders that they must return with a black antelope and no other To his vast relief, they returned sooner than he had expected and brought with them a beautiful black antelope in its prime He led the animal to his *guru* The latter wrote something on a piece of thick paper and securely fastened it to the right horn of the animal and released it The antelope disappeared with in the twinkling of an eye but what followed spelt dis aster for the entire kingdom Drought set in with the result that when the sowing season began, the young plants shrivelled up and died The months passed and food became scarce This was the opportunity for the Marwari to open up his stores and start selling his stored up wheat Wheat that season practically sold at the price of gold Sidh Raj was at a loss He could not bear to see his subjects suffer nor could he find a way to assuage their sorrows

About this time, news reached the king that a black antelope had been spotted and it had been repeat edly noticed that wherever it made its dwelling, the place soon became green and fertile

'Someone has bound the rain with this antelope,' was the verdict of the royal astrologer Thereupon the king with a handful of his followers, galloped away to where the animal had last been spotted Sure enough, the place where it was nibbling the tender, juicy plants was a lush green—a welcome sight for the men who had seen nothing but parched land for months The king and his men caught the animal and spotted the paper tied to its horn They unfastened and read it On it was written, 'Rain will fall when this note is dipped in water'

The king was carrying a golden goblet He imme diatly dipped the paper into the goblet Suddenly,

as though from nowhere, a blinding storm arose, dark clouds spanned the sky and ere the king and his men could run for shelter, torrential rain began to fall Following the motto—each man unto himself—they ran helter-skelter, unable to see a yard ahead of them but afraid to stand under a tree as blinding lightning continued unabated The king dismounted and led his horse through the rain, stumbling and falling as he went After about a couple of hours' arduous walk, he saw a spot of light in the distance Heartened by this, he trudged on, the rain falling mercilessly on his tired shoulders When he arrived at the hut, he was more dead than alive The hut belonged to a *Bhat* who was a bard and genealogist of a neighbouring king The bard wasn't at home but his wife, Rupmati was She heard a thud and opened the door to find a rain soaked man at her doorstep She pulled him in and with the aid of warm milk and thick blankets, brought back some colour to the king's pale cheeks She bade him eat the *sogra* or millet bread and *komari ki sag* or bean curry which she set before him The king was too tired to speak He ate in silence and then asked,

'Who are you and where am I ?'

'I'm Rupmati, a *Bhat's* wife and this is Choti Saghdi, a small village'

'Do you know who I am ?'

'No'

'I am King Sidh Raj You have saved my life Ask what you will and it will be granted to you'

'Sire, I deign not to ask a boon just now I shall come to you when I need it'

The rain abated and the king returned to his capital The *Bhat* too returned home and was furious to learn that a stranger had stayed in the hut in his absence He abused his wife and refused to listen to her story This angered her and she screamed,

'May I become a leper if I am lying and may you become one if you are wrong'

The *Bhat* of course became a leper and was very repentant for having doubted his wife 'It's too late for repentance,' she retorted and that kept him silent

One day she set out with her husband When she reached Sidh Raj s palace, she said to the guard, 'Please go and tell the king that his sister Rupmati is at the palace gates'

The king was informed He immediately came to the gates and inquired, Sister, what can I do for you '

Remember the boon you had once offered ?'

'Yes, I do'

'My husband here is a leper He can be cured only if he is bathed in the blood of a man who possesses twenty five virtues

'Who can that man be ?'

'Your son, was the reply

'My son' the king cried But I have only one son and he s the heir to the throne How can I kill him to cure your husband ?'

The woman shrugged her shoulders and replied,

'A Rajput's given word is more precious than life itself You had offered a boon, I have named it In case you feel you are unable to grant it, I'll take my leave'

'Wait !' the king cried 'You shall get what you have demanded Let it not be said that a Rajput went back on his word'

He went back to the palace The queen noticed his sad face and inquired the reason thereof He told

her everything, dreading to meet the anger of an outraged mother But to his great astonishment, she said,

'Why should this make you sad ? Live up to the name of a Rajput and grant the boon Only a Rajputani mother had the heart to sacrifice her only child to honour the given word Go, delay not '

Accordingly, the young prince's head was cut off and the bard's body bathed in the warm blood Lo and behold ! he emerged from the bath fully recovered Rupmati said,

'Sidh Raj, you are a true Rajput and fit to rule your kingdom Your son is herewith returned to you ' Saying this she joined the severed head to the body of the prince and he returned to life

13

A RAJPUT'S SACRIFICE

JAGDEV was a Rajput prince Once, in a fit of anger, he left his father s kingdom with his wife and set off to seek his fortune elsewhere He reached Jaisalmer and as chance would have it, he was noticed by the king The king was deeply impressed by the majestic appearance of the prince and made inquiries as to his antecedents He was delighted to learn that the prince and he were distantly related He immediately housed Jagdev and his wife in a splendid mansion with a retinue of servants at his disposal

'You are now my guest, the king said 'Stay here in comfort as long as you like'

'That cannot be, the prince replied 'I cannot accept all this unless you take me into your service'

'But what will you do ?

'Place me in whatever post there is most danger and pay me a thousand crowns a day'

'It shall be so,' said the king He summoned his treasurer and ordered, 'Pay Jagdev daily two thousand crowns This is your responsibility See that there is no difficulty about the payment'

The deed was duly written, the king affixed his seal to it and presented it to Jagdev This did not please the nobles and friends of the king There were grumblings and envy was incensed at the sight of two thousand crowns being given to Jagdev everyday

He doesn't do a jot of work For what then is he paid so much ? they asked The king turned a deaf ear

to them and continued to lavish his love and *negs* or presents on Jagdev True, Jagdev hadn't yet proved his worth but the king felt deep within him that there was a spark of greatness and valour in the man

One night there was a blinding storm Trees were uprooted, roofs blown off houses as a howling wind tore across the country In the midst of this the king distinctly heard some women singing songs near the eastern gate of the palace and some women lamenting at the other end The king was nonplussed Who could be out on such a night either to sing or lament in the open He was debating the point when he heard a noise behind him and beheld Jagdev

'Jagdev, why haven't you gone home as yet ?'

'Sire, I await your permission to leave '

'Jagdev, now that you are here, I would like you to do a job for me I hear songs being sung near the eastern gate and lamentations near the northern gate Who could be out on such a night and what could be the cause ? Go and find out and then let me know

Jagdev bowed and left the royal bedroom The king quickly wrapped a dark cloak over his rich clothes and followed him He said to himself,

'It's a dark and dangerous night I wonder if Jagdev will go at all '

The king said to the guards at the gates, 'Post some fresh guards here and go and find out why some women are singing and lamenting near my palace Bring me the information in the morning Saying this the king disappeared out of the gate He spotted Jagdev walking ahead Keeping a safe distance, he followed behind Jagdev went up to the lamenting women and asked Tell me sisters, why are you out on such a night and why are you lamenting in this manner ?

'Young man', the women replied,' we are the Fates of this kingdom The king will die tomorrow morning and that is why we weep He's a good, God fearing man and a true Rajput Who will offer prayers and sacrifices when he is gone ?'

The king heard these words but he didn't disclose his presence Jagdev then went towards the eastern gate and found a group of women singing happy *shatnam* or songs They were also dancing the *ghumar* or group dance

'Sisters, he asked, 'you are singing *shatnam* conveying happy tidings What is the reason for your happy songs ?

'We come to bear the king away He shall die tomorrow and accompany us to heaven That is why we are happy and sing the *shatnam* and dance the *ghumar*

'The king is a great man, said Jagdev ' 'There are few kings in the world to match his greatness He is a father to his subjects and *Yama* to his foes Tell me, is there no way of saving him ? Are there no offerings or sacrifices by which he can be saved from his impending doom ?'

'There is a way,' the women replied

'What is it ? Tell me quickly

'If a person of royal blood sacrifices his life this night then the king s life will be spared '

'I'm a prince Will my head, offered as a sacrifice serve the purpose ?

The women looked at him up and down and answered, 'Yes, offer your head to us and your king will be saved

'Please grant me a few minutes Allow me to go home and take leave of my wife '

'Come back within half an hour ' commanded the women

Jagdev hastened back The king who heard everything followed him at a safe distance Jagdev's wife was at the door, awaiting her husband's return The moment she saw him, she demanded,

'What had kept you away so long on this terrible night ? I was beginning to get alarmed '

'I ve come to take your leave, princess, ' Jagdev said and related everything that had happened His wife said,

'My lord, all the king's *negs* and crowns were given to us for this day The king is great, his kindness is un bounded If, by your sacrifice you can lengthen the king's life, what greater blessing can we ask for ? But wait I cannot live without you I will also sacrifice myself along with you '

'But our boys ?' cried Jagdev 'They are so young What will happen to them ? Who will look after them ?'

'You're correct We cannot leave such little chil dren behind They'll be lost Let us take them and sacrifice them too '

'As you wish,' Jagdev said and proceeded to wake up the boys He carried the elder one whilst the wife carried the younger Thus laden, the two left their mansion and walked out into the terrible night

The king had heard everything He could neither believe his ears nor his eyes

'Verily has it been said that to a Rajput, honour and one's king are dearer than life But I must follow them and see whether they really do all that they pro mised to do Sacrificing one s son is a difficult thing even for a steel hearted Rajput, no matter how dedicat ed he may be

The king followed them to the eastern gate of the palace where the women awaited them Jagdev said to them, 'I'll not only sacrifice my life but also the life of my wife and sons Grant the king at least fifty years for our sacrifice '

'So be it ' said the women

Jagdev laid the eldest son on the ground and taking out his sword cut off his head Then he placed the younger one on the ground and was about to cut off his head too when the women restrained him saying,

Enough Jagdev, enough Such faithfulness is rarely seen on earth We not only return your eldest son to life but we also grant the king fifty years of splendour and glory We wonder if he realises the gem he has in his court

Saying this the women vanished Jagdev and his wife returned to their mansion with their boys and the king marvelling at what he had seen and heard, returned to the palace

Meanwhile the guards, whom the king had ordered to inquire into the causes for the laments and songs, were too afraid to venture out on such a stormy night and deciding to stick to a fabricated story, had fallen asleep

The next morning the king his nobles and courtiers and Jagdev assembled in the court as usual The king said to Jagdev

'Prince I sent you on a certain errand last night What did you find out '

'Sire, there s nothing much to report Some women were lamenting because they had lost a dear one and another group was singing *shamani* because some good fortune had befallen the women

But why were they out on a stormy night the king insisted on knowing

'They could offer no satisfactory explanation, Your Majesty I don't think Your Majesty should waste his precious time on this

The king turned to his minister and said, 'Summon the guards who were on duty last night

The guards came and the king questioned them The leader of the group said, 'Sire, we didn't find any women lamenting What Your Majesty must have heard was the howling of jackals Near the eastern gate we too heard some singing but they had walked away by the time we reached the spot '

'Liars !' the king cried 'Liars all ! Shall I tell you what had happened ? And he told the assembled court the full story, right from the beginning The men listened in hushed silence When the king finished, he asked, 'Name me one amongst you who would have acted as Jagdev had done And you grumble and had dared to speak behind my back because I pay him two thousand crowns a day ! Even if I gave him a lakh crowns, nay, even if I offered him my kingdom, it would not be enough reward for his act '

The men hung down their head in shame Not one present could even imagine of acting as Jagdev had done And from that day, no one grudged Jagdev and his money

14

THE CARRIAGE

RAMDEO was a farmer He had prospered a great deal by his farming He had shifted from his hut to a modest house At the time when our story begins, he had again moved into a fairly large mansion He had also bought more acres of land and cultivated them with the help of hired hands He was a man of simple tastes and was satisfied with his lot Unfortunately that was not so with his wife She was a woman of great ambitions It was true that their lot had vastly improved but just one thing ruined her idea of prosperity—there was no carriage To go on foot to visit friends and relatives was below her dignity now that she lived in a mansion The proper thing would be to have a horse and carriage at her door, awaiting her pleasure She could almost see the looks of surprise and admiration in the eyes of the people as she drove regally by

One day she finally decided that she would not see another day through without a carriage at her door or at least without the promise to have one there As her husband was about to leave for the fields, she raised the topic Ramdeo was surprised, to say the least at the request which seemed to him strange He saw absolutely no harm in walking In fact he enjoyed it It gave him the opportunity to stop and talk to the people he met on the way but his wife was adamant A carriage and only a carriage would take the sulk off her face Ramdeo knew from experience how useless it was to stick to a 'no when his wife decided to turn stubborn Though he considered this particular request a ridiculous one, he nodded his head in agreement The wife was delighted and clapped her hands in

glee She said, 'What fun I shall have I shall go for rides every day and take my mother along'

'Why should you take your mother along ?'

'Why should I not ?'

'I do not see the necessity for it The carriage will be for you, not for your mother'

'That may be but how can I enjoy the rides and think of my poor mother all alone at home ? Every evening I will first pick her up and then we will both go out'

This did not please Ramdeo and he said in an angry tone, 'There is no such need I emphatically forbid you to take your mother for rides in my carriage

Not to be out done, she replied in an even louder tone, 'Who are you to forbid me or tell me what I should do ? You said that the carriage will be for me I will take whom I like Not once but twice a day I will take my mother for rides Stop me if you dare'

Ramdeo lost his temper He shouted, 'If you defy me you will repent'

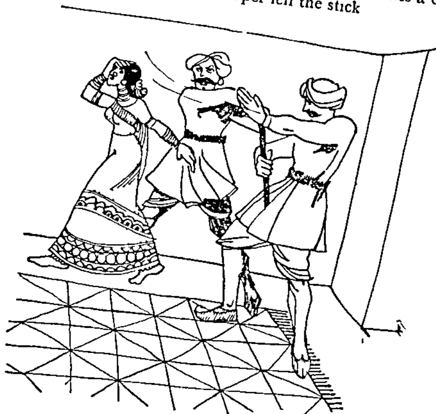
'As if I care,' came the reply with a touch of sneer, 'Do what you will but no one can prevent me from taking my mother out for rides'

Words failed Ramdeo at such defiance He looked around for a *gandi* or stick and found one near the door Picking it up he threatened, 'Do you see this *gandi* ? If you continue to defy me, I will whip the skin off your back'

'Whip me if you will but I refuse to listen to your silly orders'

The words were hardly out of her mouth when the stick swished through the air and landed on her back Ramdeo had no idea of what he was doing

Anger maddened and he put in all his strength to beat his wife She, on the other hand, screamed each time the stick fell on her but in between her screams, she shouted, 'I will take my mother a hundred times a day for rides' Faster and sharper fell the stick



The shouts and cries brought a neighbour into the house He rushed in between them and snatched away the stick from Ramdeo

'What is the meaning of this?' He demanded 'Have you decided to beat your wife to death?'

'Yes, I have I warned her not to take her mother out for rides but this shameless woman has the cheek

FOREWORD

I am glad that a cheap paper back edition of my autobiography is being issued in India This book was written by me more than a quarter of a century ago Much of it therefore, perhaps deals with matters which are no longer of topical interest But it may still be of general interest to many people in India because it deals with a period of our national struggle in which many of us were personally involved

People are apt to forget the inner content of that struggle and how it helped in changing the face of India especially the rural masses It is out of that struggle that present day India has arisen The problems today are naturally different from those of a generation ago But there is a connecting link and, in order to understand the India of today we have to have some understanding of what preceded it and what gave rise to it

Many of us were moulded by that struggle and are what we are today as a result of that struggle and the ideals and objectives that governed us then This is past history now, but sometimes it is worthwhile knowing that past in order to know better the present Essentially an autobiography is a personal document and therefore it reflects personal views and reactions But the person who wrote it became merged to a large extent in the larger Movement and therefore represents in a large measure the feelings of many others

I trust that this book will revive something of the past in the minds of many of those of the newer generation who did not have personal experience of what it describes

February 20 1962 JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

My attempt was to trace, as far as I could, my own mental development, and not to write a survey of recent Indian history The fact that this account resembles superficially such a survey is apt to mislead the reader and lead him to attach a wider importance to it than it deserves I must warn him therefore that this account is wholly one-sided and, *inevitably egotistical*, *many important happenings* have been completely ignored and many important persons, who shaped events have hardly been mentioned In a real survey of past events this would have been inexcusable, but a personal account can claim this indulgence Those who want to make a proper study of our recent past will have to go to other sources It may be, however, that this and other personal narratives will help them to fill the gaps and to provide a background for the study of hard fact

I have discussed frankly some of my colleagues with whom I have been privileged to work for many years and for whom I have the greatest regard and affection, I have also criticized groups and individuals, sometimes perhaps rather severely The criticism does not take away from my respect for many of them But I have felt that those who meddle in public affairs must be frank with each other and with the public they claim to serve A superficial courtesy and an avoidance of embarrassing and sometimes distressing questions do not help in bringing about a true understanding of each other or of the problems that face us Real co-operation must be based on an appreciation of differences as well as common points, and a facing of facts, however inconvenient they might be I trust, however, that nothing that I have written bears a trace of malice or ill-will against any individual

I have purposely avoided discussing the issues in India to-day, except vaguely and indirectly I was not in a

PREFACE

This book was written entirely in prison, except for the postscript and certain minor changes, from June 1934 to February 1935 The primary object in writing these pages was to occupy myself with a definite task, so necessary in the long solitudes of gaol life as well as to review past events in India with which I had been connected, to enable myself to think clearly about them I began the task in a mood of self questioning and to a large extent, this persisted throughout I was not writing deliberately for an audience but if I thought of an audience, it was one of my own countrymen and countrywomen For foreign readers I would have probably written differently, or with a different emphasis stressing certain aspects which have been slurred over in the narrative and passing over lightly certain other aspects which I have treated at some length Many of these latter aspects may not interest the non Indian reader and he may consider them unimportant or too obvious for discussion or debate but I felt that in the India of to day they had a certain importance A number of references to our internal politics and personalities may also be of little interest to the outsider

The reader will, I hope, remember that the book was *written during a particularly distressful period of my* existence It bears obvious traces of this If the writing had been done under more normal conditions it would have been different and perhaps occasionally more restrained Yet I have decided to leave it as it is for it may have some interest for others in so far as it represents what I felt at the time of writing

to say that not once but a hundred times a day will she take her out

The wife screamed, 'I will and I will Who are you to stop me?'

Ramdeo was about to beat her with his bare hands but the neighbour pushed him away and asked, 'Let me hear the cause of this quarrel I did not know that you had a carriage In which carriage then did your wife take her mother out ?'

The wife wept out the whole story It was with great difficulty that the neighbour stopped himself from laughing out aloud at the ridiculous story Instead he returned to Ramdeo with a stern face and said in a still sterner voice, 'So it was your horse that came into my field and nipped off all my new corn I was wondering where it had come from It is of a light brown colour, is it not ? Now heed my words and heed them well For all the damage that your horse has done to my fields either you agree to pay me the full amount I demand or I shall go to the court with a complaint !'

No man could have looked more surprised than did Ramdeo Wide eyed and speechless he looked at his neighbour, then he gulped a couple of times and asked, 'My horse in your fields? Why, that is impossible I have no horse '

'If you have no horse then who pulls your carriage ?'

'I have no carriage '

'In that case how does your wife take her mother for rides?'

'She does not do so now but she threatens that she will, when the carriage comes Tell me then how my horse could ruin your fields ?

'An imaginary carriage nearly killed your wife Why then cannot an imaginary horse ruin the crops of my fields ? You should be ashamed of yourself, Ramdeo You have no carriage and no horse but at the very thought of what your wife may do when these come, you are ready to beat her to death'

The words brought Ramdeo to his senses He felt ashamed and embarrassed Not knowing what to do he hastily left for his fields

The wife had won her point

15

THE CLEVER MARWARI

THAT particular year, the drought conditions in Marwar had been unusually bad First of all had come the *jal kal*, the dread scarcity of water and at the time when our story begins it was the days of *trinkal*, no fodder for the animals Rain had come but it had been so fitful, that, as one peasant said, it had wet only one horn of the cow and not the other The fields lay parched and cracked and for miles on end shifting sand-dunes met the eye A strong continuous wind whipped up the sand and the whole country side presented a dusty blur The cattle moved about listlessly, with no fodder and no water Rajasthan could be very dreary in severe drought

The Marwari landlord of our story was deeply worried Not only had his acres and acres of wheat shrivelled up and died before his very eyes, but his herd of cattle threatened to die Only his herd of *kahara* or camels seemed safe at the moment

One particular evening, the Marwari had his *byalu* or evening meal and retired to the *ora* or inner room of his house He soon fell asleep About midnight he felt thirsty and was about to wake up his wife when his eyes fell on a thief who had just entered the next room The Marwari promptly shut his eyes and started a thinking If he shouted for help the thief would most probably jump on him to shut his mouth and may even strangle him A shudder of horror ran down his spine at the very thought No, he would not shout for help, he firmly decided, but then to lie quietly and allow himself to be robbed was something he would not permit Very gently he awoke his wife and asked, 'Sethani,

I woke you to ask whether you have locked up the bags of fodder that were lying in the courtyard Remember I had explicitly asked you to do so'

The wife was on the point of saying that he had done nothing of that sort when the unusual question aroused her curiosity Why was he asking her such an absurd question at such an absurd hour? The Marwari gave her a meaningful push She glanced at him and at once knew something was amiss She could only guess that it was something serious She decided to play the game

Shrugging her shoulders, she replied, 'Oh, I forgot to do as you had asked There are so many things to worry about in these days of *trukal* that it s impossible to remember everything

It's exactly because of the drought that I gave such orders Are you not aware that all the fields are lying parched and dry and the cattle have nothing to eat? The result is that fodder has become a much sought after item It is being sold at the same price as silver Who can tell, its price may go up higher still You did not heed my words What if a thief should come this very night and steal them away? It will be a greater loss to me than the theft of all my cash

If such is the case then I will go and wake up the servants and have all the bags locked up in the *balhari* or store How was I to know that it had become so expensive?

'It is too late now to do any such thing but remember, it must be the very first thing you will do in the morning

With these words the Marwari pretended to go off to sleep The thief had all this while hidden behind the door and listened to the conversation He was thrilled His trade was thieving How was he to know the real

value of fodder? Of course he was aware of the *trikal* all over the land. Under such circumstances, what surprise then if fodder did sell at the price of silver? The Marwari had distinctly said that fodder was selling at the price of silver and he believed it. What was more, there were bags and bags of it lying out in the courtyard. He had only to carry them off and he would be a rich man on the morrow. He waited a few minutes to give the Marwari time to fall asleep and then he slipped out, slided down from the first floor to the ground floor and landed right in the courtyard. His eyes lit up when he spied the piled up bags of fodder. He got ready for a hard night's work, rolled up his sleeves and opened the back door. From then on it was just a matter of heaving up a bag and carrying it off to a safe place. The next two hours he spent thus, sweat coursing down his face. With the last of the bags removed, he dusted his hands, wiped his face and settled down near the pile for a well earned rest.

The next morning he hired a cart, loaded the bags on it and wended his way to the Marwari's shop. The latter immediately recognised him to be the thief of the night before. He eyed the loaded cart with interest. The thief said, 'Sethji, I have these bags of fodder to sell. Do you wish to buy them?'

'I am certainly interested in them. At what price are you selling them?'

'I am informed that fodder is selling at the price of silver. Of course I do not demand such a high price but I would prefer you to name the sum you can pay.'

'Fodder at the price of silver?' asked the surprised Marwari. 'Whoever told you such a thing?'

'Oh, I have my sources of information,' came the reply.

'I would not trust such sources if I were you.'

'Do not to try cheat me, I know exactly how dear it is in these days of *trinkal*'

'Sure enough you know how dear it is but me thinks you are aware only of last night's price Of course the price of fodder is higher now than ever before but it is still one of the cheapest things in the market But why are you bothered about price at all ? What difference does it make to you ? You did not spend a coin out of your pocket to buy those bags of fodder in the cart and so whatever price you get means clear profit for you'

The words embarrassed the thief Without a word he got up and led his cart away The Marwari was happy that he had incurred the loss of only a few bags of fodder Even the *trinkal* has its uses, he thought consolingly

16

THE INVALUABLE SWORD

TO the Rajput, his sword used to be his dearest possession A wooden sword was his first toy and as he grew in years, so changed the condition of his sword By the time he was fifteen years old, he became an expert swordsman, ever ready to unsheath it to defend his honour and that of his country During his waking hours and even when he slept, it never left his side But this was not the case with every Rajput

Once a Rajput Thakur was in dire need of money It was not a very large sum that he wanted About Rs 250/ would have met his need yet he could find no means of getting it He had no intention of selling any of his belongings to collect the money How then was he to get it ? If he went to the Bania or money lender the latter would demand a security The Thakur did not wish to touch his wife s jewellery The only other thing that he possessed was his sword Monetarily it was not really worth much but a Thakur's sword could not be valued in terms of money In the opinion of the Thakur, it was invaluable

The Bania to whom he went, held other views Through generations, he and his kind had never ventured beyond the limits of business They kept at a safe distance from a sword, specially a Thakur's sword, who was known to wield it freely the moment he felt that his honour had been touched Thus from times immemorial, the Bania and the sword had never been on friendly terms

The Thakur of our story, sword in hand, entered the Bania's shop, and came straight to the point He said 'I want to borrow Rs 250/-

'Against what ?' asked the cautious Bania

The Thakur hung his head for a moment and then said 'Against this sword

The Bania looked uncomfortable He said, 'How can I give you so much money against a mere sword as security ?'

'A mere sword did you say ?' shouted the enraged Thakur 'This *sword of mine is invaluable How dare* you try to put a price tag on a Rajput's sword!

'No no, stammered the Bania 'I am doing nothing of the sort Who am I to know the worth of a sword ? I don t even know the feel of one I only wish to say that according to custom, money is given against some property or jewellery '

'My dear man, said the Thakur with a great show of patience 'If I did have property or jewellery why then would I have come to you for such a small sum? I would have sold my belongings and got the money It is because I have nothing that I am here with my sword It is as good as putting my honour in your hands It seems you do not realise what a sword means to a Rajput '

'But Thakurji, he protested 'I cannot give you money against something, the value of which I know nothing about

The Thakur needed the money and needed it urgently He knew that he could not risk the Bania going elsewhere to check the value of the sword for it was not really worth more than Rs 15/ Somehow the Bania had to be convinced that the sword was an expensive one His plan was to take the money and leave the sword there for good He cleared his throat and said, I am aware that you have little knowledge of a sword but you can safely take my word that this sword is worth Rs 5,000/

This the Bania simply refused to believe It was true he knew nothing about swords but that did not mean that he would accept any impossible price that was named and he said so

The Thakur did not give up He could not afford to do so He replied hastily, 'I named that sum because that is exactly how much it is worth to me Had it not been for my poor state I would never have dreamt of exchanging it for such a paltry sum

'Then what is it really worth ?'

The question heartened the Thakur It showed that the Bania had started to take an interest in the sword He said with renewed enthusiasm Have no fear about the worth of the sword Though it may not be worth the sum I mentioned yet you can sell it any day for at least Rs 500/ For that you have my solemn word

The Bania believed the Thakur though with some reluctance He picked up the sword gingerly and put it aside The Thakur practically grabbed the money which the Bania held out sure within himself that was the last that the Bania was to see either of him or the money

For one whole year he tactfully evaded the Bania On the completion of a year, the latter started to feel uncomfortable The determined effort of the Thakur to avoid him made him suspicious One day when a very close friend of his, a Thakur by caste, visited him, he brought out the sword and asked, Can you tell me the real worth of this sword ?'

'Where did you get it from ? queried the friend

'A Thakur took Rs 250/ against this saying that it would fetch at least double the amount in the market

The friend broke out into loud laughter 'So at last my shrewd friend has been cheated My dear man, this sword is not worth more than Rs 15/ '

The Bania felt cheated but as his friend had said, he was a shrewd man He would not allow a loss in his accounts He spent a few days making a foolproof plan He hid the sword in his backyard and then set up a great row that it had been stolen His frightened servants ran hither and thither upsetting things as they searched for the stolen sword The house was searched high and low but the missing sword could nowhere be traced

By and by the news reached the ears of the Thakur, as the Bania had rightly guessed that it would The Thakur rubbed his hands in glee at the news 'What luck, he said exultantly 'Now the miserly Bania will have to pay any sum that I care to name '

The Thakur borrowed Rs 250/ from another Bania this time placing his wife s jewellery as security Money in hand he came to the first Bania The latter was the very picture of innocent surprise The Thakur haughtily banged the bag of coins on his desk and said, Here is your money Now give me back my sword

The Bania coughed and fiddled and then said, 'Thakurji I am afraid, I have lost your sword

'What ! screamed the Thakur 'Lost my precious sword, did you say ? Impossible

'I know this news has been a terrible shock to you but I request you to give me a few more days Perhaps I may succeed in tracing it '

'I simply refuse to do any such thing I must have the sword now thundered the Thakur patting his colourful turban

'Are you determined ? Will you not consider my position ?

'Absolutely not Bring out my sword at once It is the one I had inherited from my fore fathers and is very dear to me

'Well, if you insist, I will make a final attempt to look for it'

The Bania let the bag of coins lie where it was and went in After a while he emerged, sword in hand He saw the colour drain from the Thakur's face but pretended not to notice

'You are indeed a lucky man, Thakurji,' said he, laying his hand firmly on the bag 'Here, take your sword In future never part with such an invaluable thing You may lose it'

The Thakur took the sword and took his leave, a heart broken man The Bania had a hearty laugh when the Thakur left his shop

17

WHEN FORTUNE SMILES

THE king of a small but prosperous kingdom of Rajasthan was a generous man, but, as his subjects said his generosity was confined only to those who pleased him. On such men no matter who they were or what they did, he showered his gifts.

He had many friends and the list of loyal followers seemed virtually unending. Amongst this group was a beggar at the city gates. Time over again he had contributed his mite that reflected his loyalty to the king but the latter had rarely noticed him and had never wasted a moment's thought on him. The beggar too had never done anything with the hope of a reward. He stood there at the city gates day and night and in all seasons of the year. Neither the heat of summer nor the biting cold of winter could persuade him to leave his post. Here he stood with a begging bowl stretched out before him. He never spoke to any one. He believed it seemed in the Marwari proverb, *Kai batauan sun kar batauano batto houai*—deeds are better than words. Though he spoke to none his beady eyes watched the men who passed in and out of the city gates. He had been here so many years that he knew nearly every face that passed him by but he never gave up this vigilance that he had set for himself. He watched as he begged and lived on the alms that he found in his bowl at the day's end.

One evening there was a blinding storm. After it had swept across the city, it left behind a haze of dust which together with the gathering darkness made it practically impossible to see anyone on the road. It was about this time that the beggar spotted two men entering

the city What it was that caught his notice he could not immediately tell It was surely not their faces, for as we already know it was a dusty and dark night and he could hardly see their faces as they passed him by in the crowd that entered the city Their dress too was that of the peasant folk of Rajasthan, so it was not their dress that could have caught his attention The beggar looked at them with greater interest and then he knew It was their feeling of awkwardness in the clothes they wore and which showed itself in the way they walked This is what appeared odd It seemed as though they had donned the clothes for the first time in their lives and felt uncomfortable in them

As these men entered the city, the beggar left his post and followed them His suspicion and curiosity had been aroused and he was determined to find out as much he could about these strangers The men were not aware of a beggar following them and even if they were they gave no thought to it for whoever worried about a beggar and his thoughts ? The men entered the poorer quarters of the city and retired for the night, into a cheap lodge

The beggar hastened to beg the audience of the king Here he related all that he had seen and then he once again returned to his post at the city gates The king had recognised the beggar for he had often seen him when he passed through the gates At first the king was tempted to dismiss the words of the beggar but on second thought he called his ministers and issued orders to arrest the two strangers The arrests were made and the men brought to the palace for questioning They were, it was found, spies of the Moghuls and were thrown into prison The king dismissed the whole episode from his mind The thought of rewarding the beggar did not strike him

Once the king went a hunting with a large party The forests of his kingdom were famous for wild boars and deer Seated on a colourful *houdah* ni

ficent elephant, the king rode into the jungle His eyes fell on the man who walked ahead of the animal with a sturdy wooden staff in hand It was the beggar of the city gates A frown creased the king's forehead but he said nothing Whilst he hunted animals with spear and bow, the beggar killed many a boar and deer with his staff At the day's end he placed his killings at the king's feet, bowed low and returned to his place The king accepted the gift with a slight nod of his head, said nothing and returned to his palace

There is a strong belief among the people of Rajasthan that only when one merits good fortune does Lakshmi the Goddess of Fortune smile on him This may probably be the reason why one day, without any particular reason the king realised that though he had distributed much wealth, he had never given anything to the beggar at the city gates The realisation made him an impatient man and he wished to make amends for his long negligence but he also wished to test and see whether the beggar was fit to receive the blessing of Lakshmi The king took a big coconut and went into the treasure room Here he expertly cut the fruit in two, filled the hollow inside with precious gems and then sealed the coconut in such a way that there appeared no trace of the cut

He summoned the beggar to the palace and said, 'I have been pleased with you and as a mark of my appreciation I wish to give you this '

The beggar expectantly put out his hand but his face fell when a coconut was placed in it Without a word, he took it and wended his way to the city gates Here he met a man riding into the city on a fine white steed The big coconut in the beggar's hand caught the man's eye Reining his horse to a halt he called the beggar and asked 'Will you sell that coconut to me ?

'Aye sir !' was the reply

Coconut and money changed hands and the men went their ways The horseman happened to be a messenger from a neighbouring kingdom He rode to the palace and was ushered into the presence of the king After the message was conveyed, he presented the coconut to the king The latter at once recognised the fruit and asked 'Where did you get this ?'

'From a man near the city gates '

The king kept the coconut away The next week he again called the beggar and gave it to him as a sign of his pleasure The beggar took the reward and returned to his place That morning the queen with her maids went by that way They were on their way to the temple atop the hill beyond the city gates The queen spotted the coconut in the beggar's hand She stopped her retinue and giving a gold coin to a maid asked her to buy the fruit from the man Once again the coconut changed hands

On her return from the temple, the queen presented the coconut to the king

'Is it not a big and beautiful fruit?' she asked fondly

Once again the king recognised the coconut and felt deeply disappointed The beggar still does not merit the blessings of Lakshmi That is why he has not found the wealth in the coconut The king took the fruit and for the third time called the beggar and gave it to him The king was eager to give, the beggar reluctant to receive the result was that in the course of giving and taking the fruit fell on the ground and split into two Precious gems spilled out The beggar looked down in speechless wonder The king laughed and said, 'At last Lakshmi has smiled on you I was testing to see when you would merit this wealth Gather the gems and go your way in peace '

18

THE FARMER WHO OUT-SMARTED HIMSELF

ONCE a dweller of the great forest of Rajasthan came to a village situated on the banks of the Banas river He looked wide eyed at the numerous wells in the numerous fields, full of clear water Water was the most precious thing to him and to the people of the desert Even foodgrain didn't have the same importance It could well be left unprotected but water was stored behind locked bars But this village on the banks of the river was different True, the river wasn t broad here but it was a river all the same and it went merrily by the village, glistening brightly in the sun

'How beautiful everything is here,' murmured the stranger He went towards a field where he spotted a farmer It was a rich green field, a sight practically unknown to the stranger What really amazed him and caught his fancy was the *gharliyon* or Persian wheel He had never seen one He had also never heard of one before He watched fascinated as the wheel went round and round the cans caught the water from the well and drained it into the fields He watched it for a long time and then said to the farmer,

'There seems to be no end to the *gharliyon* How long is this chain of cans ?

The farmer was a merry fellow and he liked to fool others He laughed heartily at the stranger s words and said,

'You mean to say that you don't even know that ? This chain has passed through the seven worlds How then can there be an end to it ?

These words staggered the stranger He gaped and this amused half a dozen men who were sitting there

'What an ignorant fellow!' they whispered The stranger had fully believed the farmer's words Full of amazement he asked

'But who fills up all those cans?'

Your father fills them up' came the prompt reply 'Didn't you know that I engaged your father last year?'

The news upset the stranger His face grew solemn and he said, 'Poor father! He must be shivering with cold down there'

The farmer eyed the fine blanket that was hanging over the stranger's shoulders and said, 'Why don't you give that blanket? I will send it down to him'

Without a question or doubt, the man handed over the blanket The onlookers laughed at him but he said 'My father is dearer to me than that blanket How can I use it when I know that my father is down there, shivering with cold?'

The farmer quietly kept the blanket while the stranger bade farewell and a 'God be with you' and went back to his village The onlookers said to the farmer,

'You're a clever fellow! How easily you fooled that man and relieved him of his blanket We should all get a share After all it was really because of us that you got it Had we just said the word that man would never have given it to you

'You're right but I can't cut up the blanket and give you each a piece Let the corn ripen, then you can have your share'

The story of the blanket spread to the farmer's village People called the stranger a fool while they complimented the farmer on his cleverness

Spring over, the stranger returned to the field As soon as the villagers heard of his arrival they all came crowding out to see him After all, he had been their main topic for conversation during the long winter months On being questioned he admitted that he had given his blanket to the farmer to be passed on to his

father who spent all his time in the well, filling up the cans The words of the man sent the villagers into peals of laughter and they clapped each other's backs in merriment Never had they heard a sillier tale Their attitude had no effect on the stranger He waited patiently for them to calm down and then he said,

'You all believe, don't you that I did give the blanket to the farmer? It is true, isn't it?'

All the heads nodded in agreement The stranger continued 'My father, in spite of all difficulties has filled the endless chain of cans and helped to irrigate the fields He did it all by himself, unaided by anyone If he hadn't filled the cans, not one sheaf of corn would have grown here Thus it's but fair that I should get half the corn grown in these fields The farmer is a good man He won't deny me what is mine by right

Never had anything shocked the farmer as the words of this man of the desert, this man, whom he had dismissed as an ignorant fool The villagers laughed at the stranger's words and replied

'What a fool you are! The farmer was only joking with you How can anyone, let alone your father sit in a well day in and day out and fill up cans? Not even the great God would be able to do it'

'That I don't know We don't have wells in the deserts I wouldn't know who fills up that endless chain of cans If what you say is true and my father is not there in the well then the farmer shouldn't have taken my blanket It was not correct Why should I suffer for his wrong behaviour? I refuse to give up my share of the corn and that means half of the corn harvested Let the farmer bear the loss All I know and need to know is that my father has filled the cans with water and helped to irrigate the fields Hence I must get a fair share of the produce'

The farmer ran all the way to his hut and returned with the blanket, the cause of all the trouble

'Here, take your blanket, my good man,' he said 'I was only joking '

'Don't think me that simple I'm not going to touch that blanket Give me my share of the corn and I'll go my way I'm sure many people here will take my side and see justice done to me



The villagers whispered amongst themselves, 'This man speaks correctly The farmer should give him what he demands After all he fooled this simple man Why didn't he think of the consequences when he took that beautiful blanket ?'

The stranger, to his great joy, found the villagers more sympathetic to him and supporting him Before the farmer could think of a way out, the corn had been equally divided into two parts The villagers helped in the work The farmer begged, he wept, but the stranger remained adamant Half the corn and nothing else would satisfy him He neatly tied up his share in a big piece of cloth that he had so shrewdly remembered to bring along and departed in good spirits The villagers now marvelled at his cleverness whilst they pointed their fingers at the miserable farmer and called him a fool and a cheat

19

THE FLYING ELEPHANT

ONCE there were two princes They lived happily in a big palace till their dear mother died and their father married again The new queen disliked the boys and one day when the king was out hunting, she ordered two horsemen to carry the children out of the kingdom and leave them in the wilderness The orders were accordingly executed and the young princes found themselves in a strange land They were brave lads and were not afraid They began to walk, and by and by they came to a rich kingdom One day, as they were walking through the streets, the king of the land rode past them He stopped to admire the young princes for they were handsome lads He ordered his men to take them to the palace

He asked them, Who are you and from where do you come?'

The elder prince related their sad story To this the king replied, 'Stay there with me, and help me to look after my vast kingdom I have a beautiful daughter I request you to marry her You shall be king when I retire'

The prince agreed and the marriage was performed with great pomp and splendour After a few years the king retired and left the kingdom in the charge of the elder prince He ruled wisely and together with the younger prince, they lived happily in the palace

One day, one of the bordering villages of the kingdom was attacked and the elder prince, now the king, rode away with his army

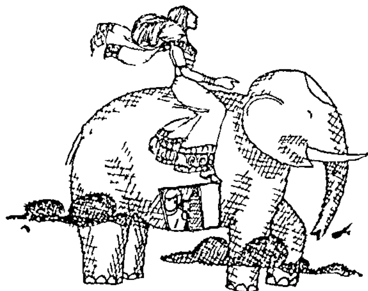
'Take care of my dear brother,' he said to his wife 'See that no harm comes to him'

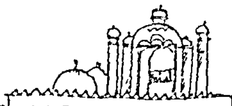
The younger prince was lonely after his brother's departure He persuaded an old soldier to teach him fencing and he spent most of his time learning the new art He had a room overlooking the palace gardens Just outside his door there was a big elephant of white marble One night, the prince was suddenly awakened by a strange noise His eyes met a strange sight The white elephant was getting ready to fly The princess was seated on its back and soon the animal and the princess had flown away into the night Towards dawn the two returned The elephant settled down at its regular place and became immobile The princess stealthily went into the palace The prince was intrigued He waited to see if the princess would say anything But as she kept quiet on that subject, he too did not raise the topic. That evening he retired earlier than usual He went out and examined the elephant He not only found it hollow but he also discovered a small trap door in its stomach He slipped inside and waited patiently for the night Not much later he heard the princess sit on the elephant She tapped it twice The elephant heaved itself into the air and flew away It flew for sometime and then it alighted The prince waited When he was sure that the princess had gone away, he slipped out He found himself in a palace garden The palace before him was brightly illuminated It appeared as though a marriage was being celebrated The prince, unobserved, walked out of the palace He had walked for some distance when he met a bridal procession To his amazement, a richly clad man ran forward and taking hold of his hand led him aside The man asked, 'Can you do us a favour ?'

'What is it?'

'Our prince is squint eyed and ugly The bride's father doesn't know this If he sees the prince, he'll

surely turn us away from his door We cannot afford this He has promised us a very large dowry and we don't want that to slip through our hands You are a handsome young man Agree to take the prince's place just for tonight and we'll amply reward you '





The prince, always fond of adventure saw no harm in this He changed clothes and mounted the colour fully decorated horse The bridal procession then

wended its way to the palace and they were greeted with fireworks and flowers

'That's a handsome *bhanwarji* indeed, said the ladies as they admired the bridegroom The prince was immediately led to the *mandap* or the marriage altar and the ceremony started without delay The prince once spied his sister in law but she appeared very busy and did not take note of him Marriage over, the bride and bridegroom were led to a room It was well past mid night and the prince was impatient to leave As soon as they were alone, he said, 'Excuse me, dear princess for what I must disclose now ' He then related how he had been made to change places with the actual bride groom

'Tomorrow, he will come and claim you as his bride Execuse the duplicity I must leave now,' the prince said

The princess, though shocked at his story, restrained him and said, 'I have been married to you and I am your wife No one else can claim me as his wife Go if you must, but let me have your ring Take this ring of mine These will be the proof of our marriage '

Rings were exchanged and the prince hurried away He stepped into the elephant and shut the trap door After a while he heard two taps and the elephant rose to the air When it landed, the prince waited for the princess to go in before he stepped out He went into his room but the princess had, without his know ledge seen him as he emerged from the elephant and went into his room The princess was alarmed He would surely tell his brother The prospect frightened her and she was determined to get rid of her brother in law She brought a magic thread and when the young prince was asleep, she slipped the thread around his neck No sooner was this done than the prince was turned into a deer and ran out of the palace The horror of the prince knew no bounds when he found himself a-

deer How would he defend himelf from the terrible beasts that roamed the forests? He didn't venture far into the forest He roamed about on the road leading to the palace After a few days the elder brother returned that way from the war He saw the deer and halted to admire its lovely coat The deer on the other hand, who in reality was the younger prince, was thrilled to see his brother It came gracefully through the trees to where the elder prince was standing Suddenly the thread on its neck caught a twig and snapped In a moment the deer had disappeared and the young prince stood in its place

'What's the meaning of this ?' cried the elder prince

The younger prince told him the whole story and related how he came to be in his present condition The elder prince seethed with anger

'That woman is a witch', he said, else how could she make a marble elephant fly ? I shall punish her before she can do any more harm '

He slipped the magic thread around his brother s neck and the younger prince once more turned into a deer The elder prince led the deer to the palace

'Where is my brother?' he asked his wife She had not seen the deer as it was near the palace gates She replied,

'The prince rode away yesterday and has not yet returned '

'Then who is this?' the elder prince asked and led the deer into the room He removed the magic thread from its neck and the younger prince stood before them The princess was frightened and began to weep Her husband ordered her to be thrown into prison

'Now let's ride the marble elephant and go to your bride's palace, he said to his brother But when they were atop the elephant, it remained as immobile as ever

'How is this ?' exclaimed the elder prince

'Only your wife can make it fly,' replied the brother

The princess was summoned and ordered to pilot the elephant to the bride s palace

'Whose palace is it by the way ? the elder prince asked

'My uncle's,' she replied 'We have to cross seven hills before we can reach it I had gone to attend my cousin's wedding '

The princess tapped the elephant twice It heaved itself into the air and flew swiftly through the air After a while it alighted in her uncle's palace gardens The princess led them to her uncle, who was a mighty king The elder prince said, 'My brother has come to claim his bride

Claim his bride! exclaimed the astonished old man 'How can that be ? He's not the husband of my daughter '

'He has proof Please summon your daughter here

The princess came and was overjoyed to see the younger prince

'That's my husband !' she cried She showed them the ring that she wore on her finger The elder prince recognised it as the one belonging to his brother Then the younger prince showed the ring that he had The old king recognised it as the one belonging to his daughter The young prince repeated his story The king was happy that his daughter had after all married a hand ome young prince The marriage ceremony was once again performed, this time with greater pomp Then the brothers with their wives flew back to their kingdom on the elephant s back On return, the elder prince had the elephant destroyed He forgave his wife and they all lived happily together

20

CHOTU DECIDES ON A CAREER

THIS is a story from Mandore when it was just taking on the appearance of a village It had been a hamlet In this village there lived a simpleton His name was Chotu Mandore in those days did not boast of any doctors There was a milkman who prided himself on his knowledge of herbs and indigenous medicines The simple village folk brought all their ailments to him and he treated them with a superior air

One day a young man came to Mandore He was a doctor and had been sent by the Rana The village folk thanked him and offered special prayers in the village temple for the long life and prosperity of the Rana The young doctor was an unassuming man and became a popular figure in a fortnight s stay in Man dore Chotu had heard of the wondrous cures the doctor had wrought and he made up his mind to become a doctor This news pleased his parents tremendously They had always chided him for being without ambition, a drifter they often called him At last their Chotu had decided on a career which their simple minds could never have conceived Their Chotu was to become a doctor!

Now that Chotu had decided on a career, all that he lacked was a tutor One bright morning, he left the village in search of one He went from village to village, he even went to a town that had distracted him out of his simple wits, but go where he did and though he found a number of doctors whom he would have con descended to accept as tutors these men refused to take him under their wing Why it should be so, Chotu could not for the life of him understand But that he

was offended and hurt, aye very deeply so, he had to acknowledge All these refusals had sapped his enthusiasm and he decided to return to Mandore

One day, he was disconsolately walking homewards It was a hot day and the heat added to his misery On and on he walked the dusty miles Suddenly his attention was drawn to a group of men who were sitting around a prostrate camel Chotu discovered that a big bulge on the animal's throat was the cause of the men's concern The men had evidently reached a decision just when Chotu came on the scene, for they all stood up One man brought a large stone whilst another wrappod a cloth around the camel s throat who appeared more dead than alive One of the men raised the stone in the air and brought it down with a thud on the camel's throat The animal gave a few convulsions, gulped once or twice and then stood up Ere long, the men led it away and continued their journey

All this while Chotu had been a silent but wide eyed spectator He was considerably impressed What he did not know was that the camel, whilst nibbling a creeper, had accidentally swallowed a small pumpkin and this had got stuck in its throat The impact of the stone on the throat had burst the pumpkin and it had slid down the camel s throat

Chotu was unaware of all this He had only seen the animal being cured of the swelling

'Ram, Ram,' he murmured 'Is a doctor's job that easy ? A wrap and a stone and you have cured a swelling'

He chided himself for having wasted precious time Anyway, it's never too late to make a beginning, so Chotu retracted his steps and headed for the nearest village He was overjoyed at what he saw, two men were suffering from swollen throats He approached them and said to them in a most confident tone

'I see you are suffering from a painful disease Have no fear I am a new doctor to this village I have specialised in the treatment of swollen throats '

'God bless you,' said the old man ' We have tried all sorts of remedies but nothing seems to work Cure us and we will pay you handsomely '

This pleased Chotu He made hurried preparations for the demonstration of his healing abilities News had got around about the wonder cure man and a group of interested folk had assembled Chotu called his first patient, 'victim may sound more appropriate He took off his shirt and wrapped it round the swollen throat, then he picked up a stone It was a big one and the patient eyed it nervously

'What s that for?' he squeaked The villagers crowded nearer Chotu waved them away and replied,

'There s no need to panic In a moment all will be over ' With these words he raised the stone and brought it down with a bang on the old man's throat The old man let out a bloodcurdling cry and then he promptly dropped down dead Before Chotu could collect his wits, an angry man had caught him by the scruff of his neck and demanded,

'What's the meaning of this ?'

I-I I ', stammered Chotu He had no remorse for the old man He was bothered about his own safety, which, at that moment appeared jeopardized

'Stop stammering', shouted his tormentor 'You ve killed my father, Do you realise that ? For this I'm going to hang you up the nearest tree '

Chotu was too frightened to protest He was dragged out The interested crowd parted to make way It seemed to be getting a rare kick out of the whole episode A man hanged ! Why, even their fathers had never witnessed such a sight ! Thus it was with a great deal of eager anticipation that they watched the proceedings Suddenly the village priest came running

'Stop ! Stop !' he cried 'Jaisingh, what is this that you are about to do ?

'This man just now killed my father He deserves to die and die he will But he is not going to die as fast as he made my father to die It will be a s l o w death for him,' the young man said, lovingly rolling the words on his tongue Chotu, for all practical purposes, had lost his tongue and his wits

'Stop this nonsense,' admonished the priest 'Calm yourself and listen to me After all your father was old and ailing He would not have lived very long This man is a stranger and a fool Let him go He is sure to be amply punished for his innate foolishness'

The young man was reluctant to release Chotu but he held the priest in high esteem and could not override his command

'All right', he said He led Chotu out of the village, gave him a mighty kick and then returned

Chotu lay half dazed, for the kick had carried him some distance and landed him plump on a thorny patch Unmindful of the shooting pains, Chotu picked himself up and hurried away as fast as possible But he had not evidently learnt his lesson as we shall presently see

A few days later he was passing through another village A sadder and more despondent man than Chotu would probably have been hard to find but suddenly his spirits and hopes revived He had spied a potential victim The man s, that is the victim's right leg was swollen and he was groaning in pain

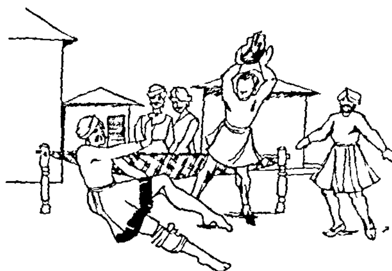
'Sir', cried Chotu blithely, 'your days of pain are over'

'How so ?' asked the man

'I am a doctor and I have specialised in curing swollen limbs'

'I thank God for sending you to my door step I am a rich man but I have learnt to my great misery that money cannot cure The best doctors have attended on me but to no avail If you can cure me son I'll heap you with wealth

Chotu turned starry eyed at the promised wealth He set to work He had lost his shirt in the last village, so he took a piece of cloth from the ailing man He carefully wrapped the swollen leg, picked up a stone and brought it crushing down The man yelled and cried and abused heartily It fact he made such a deafening noise that his servants rushed into the room to verify the cause They took in the situation in one glance, the victim was using all the words in his vocabulary to abuse Chotu who turned a deaf ear to the tirade but looked at the servants with apprehension The moment the servants realised *what had happened, they caught him by the* scruff of his neck and shook him as a cat shakes a mouse Then without much ceremony, they flung him out as though he was an unwanted piece of furniture



Chotu groaned He had landed on his nose His face and his body were stiff with pain but it was not the time to wallow in the luxury of pain He heaved him self up and limped away as fast as his creaking joints would allow He returned home a heart broken man, *his dream of being a Doctor was shattered*

BELATED REALIZATION

AN old woman was on the way to attend the engagement of her nephew This boy was the only son of the family and her brother was celebrating the engagement on a lavish scale True the old woman was of moderate means and couldn't afford expensive presents for the bride to be, inspite of her desires She had bought a few gold ornaments such as a pair of *pahunchi*, which had beautiful finger rings and the design on the bracelet was delicate and intricate The chains connecting the rings and the bracelet were in the shape of delicate interlaced leaves, a *kasumbe* or veil which was the traditional red coloured one with a gold border, and a gold hip chain for keys and of course the inevitable *negs* or presents for the relatives All these things, she carefully put into a box, covered them with clothes and securely locked the box With this perched on her head she began to walk the weary miles Nature and fate, it seemed, had pitted their strength against her—the mid-day sun was hot, miles and miles of road stretched before her, the box weighed heavily on her shoulders and age had deprived her of strength and agility With great difficulty she walked on automatically putting one foot before the other, when she spotted a man coming her way on a camel She called out to him and the man brought his camel to a stop The old woman observed that he was a young man His looks pleased her and she felt she could trust him He seemed to be in a hurry She said to him, 'Son, can you do me a favour? I am on my way to attend my nephew's engagement and I'm carrying some jewellery and *negs* in this box I'm finding this box too heavy to carry Moreover, I still have about ten miles to travel and here I feel as though I don't have the strength to walk even a few steps I d be eternally grateful to you if you would take charge of this box and deliver it at my brother's residence You have a camel, a little extra weight on the camel will not make much of a difference whereas to me..

it will make a whole world of difference I can then walk as slowly as my old limbs will allow

The camel driver shook his head, 'I'm sorry', he said, 'but I can't help you I'm not going in the direction of your brother's village Do you see that road bifurcating? I'll turn left there whilst your brother's village is to the right Actually I wouldn t have minded a slight detour to help an old lady but I'm in a hurry I m carrying a message from my master to a chieftain and it will brook no delay I'am really sorry but I must now take my leave

'In that case, I can't detain you any longer You may go'

The old woman watched the departure of the camel and its driver She was sad that she had failed to lighten her weight, when, like a burst of lightning, she realised the fool hardy step she had nearly taken She had been on the verge of trusting a total stranger with her precious load! Not for a moment had she thought that in doing so she may have lost everything If the driver had taken the box and then vanished, who would have believed that she had given such precious stuff to a stranger? She thanked God a thousand times that the box was safely with her even though its weight was bearing her down But she blessed the camel driver all the more for being so honest It's because of such men' she said to herself, 'that the world is still so good place to live in And so, blessing and praying by turns, the old woman ended her way

The camel driver, on the other hand had gone some distance, when he realised what a fool he had been He murmured

'What a fool I have been! Unasked for wealth was practically mine and I like a big fool turned my back on it The simple old woman didn t even inquire about my name and destination I could have taken the box and disappeared and she would never had been able to pin point the theft on me I'll be made the butt of ridicule if ever this story of my foolishness gets around

Anyway, the situation is still not out of my hands I'll go back and offer to carry her box I'm sure she'd bless me for it'

The camel driver turned his camel around and retraced his steps Soon he came upon the woman resting against a date palm She was breathing heavily and sweating profusely She had firmly planted the box beside her and was resting with eyes shut She must have heard the camel approaching for she suddenly opened her eyes and sat up alert This didn't escape the camel driver's observation and he felt a bit uncomfortable, but now that he had planned to retrieve lost opportunities, he smiled broadly, almost ingratiatingly and said

'*Mayar*, good old mother, I had gone some distance when I realised that I had done a wrong thing in refusing one who reminded me so much of dear departed mother and I immediately returned Give me your box I'll safely deliver it to your brother'

To this the old lady replied, 'Son, thanks for your kind offer and also for wasting so much of your precious time in retracing your steps, specially when you are carrying message that can brook no delay No, go your way I'm feeling rested now and confident that the rest of the journey will not be as strenuous as it had hither to been Moreover, if you had accepted this box when I had first offered it to you, I would have definitely handed it over to you But you refused then and have come back after having second thoughts on the subject Similarly, on second thoughts I have decided to carry the box myself I've heard it said that people tend to become wiser on second thoughts So I'll thank you for your offer and resume my journey'

These words of the old woman embarrassed the camel driver and without so much as 'May I take your leave, he quickly turned the camel around and returned the way he had come The old lady felt relieved and happy

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